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ARCADE  
**FIRE**

BUCKCHERRY

**DRAKE**  
VS. THE-DREAM

**EMINEM**

**THE ROAD TO A STUNNING RECOVERY**

BY JONAH WEINER /// PHOTOS BY MACIEK KOBIELSKI

*"I started to  
become that  
cliché: my own  
worst enemy."*

AUGUST 2010

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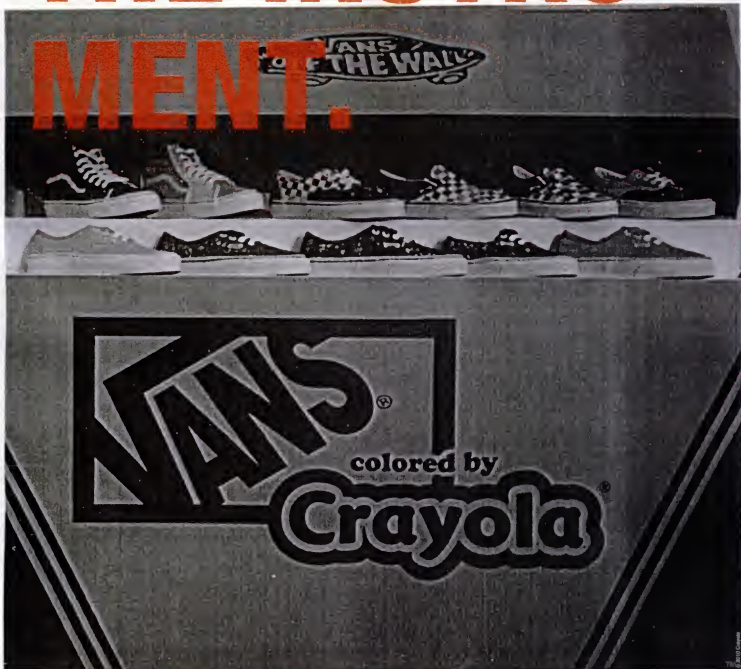
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♦ 49 Joel throws his wanderlust into a waterproof bag and off we go for Vans Apparel, Surf 2010.

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## PIONEERS OF CHANGE



# Hayley Williams of Paramore inspires green thinking

With a legion of fans hungry to hear her every song and read her every Tweet, Paramore lead singer **Hayley Williams** is more than just a star. She's also a role model, and one who treats her environmental responsibility seriously. That's why Paramore is taking part in the 2010 Honda Civic Tour, which, in partnership with nonprofit organization Reverb, is dedicated to making the road as green as possible.

## What can Paramore achieve as far as educating your fans about green issues?

I don't know about you, but I hear things sometimes, and they go in one ear and out the other. So I think it's good for the new ADD generation of rock'n'roll fans to learn about the environment at a concert—where it's unexpected. It's one thing to hear about being green from your parents or from a teacher, but it's something different to hear it from a band.

I think fans might be more apt to listen to us than some of the usual sources.

## In what ways has the band changed its touring practices to become more environmentally friendly?

As far as the show in general, there's an area set up where fans can go and learn different ways to be green. We're also part of a carbon offset program. Then there's a group we've partnered with called

pickupal.com that encourages people to carpool to the shows. I used to carpool when I was little—it was rad. Who doesn't want to be in a car with your friends? The backstage stuff is awesome as well. We'll be recycling and using biodegradable utensils, plates, and cups. Simple, easy things like that end up making a big difference. There's so much needless waste that happens on tour, but it doesn't take much to really cut it back.

## Has learning about what your band can do differently changed what you do as an individual?

Yeah, definitely. I just bought my first house, and I'm trying to translate what I've learned about touring into the way I

live in my own home—even though I'm only there for about five days a year. One thing I used to be really bad at, and sometimes still am if I don't catch myself, is leaving the lights on. If I'm in a hurry, I just run out my door. Then I'll come home at night, and every light in the house will be on. That's terrible! It's such a waste of energy. So I'm still getting better with the whole situation, but I'm certainly more aware of what I'm doing. Now, whether I'm at my mom's house or at a hotel, I try to remember to be good about the lights! The most important thing is to start thinking about how to be green, wherever you are. Anything you can do is going to make an impact.





Inside SPIN

# FEATURES

AUGUST 2010

"I'D SPENT MOST  
OF MY CAREER  
CALLING BULLS--T.  
AND SUDDENLY, I  
STARTED RUNNING  
OUT OF ENEMIES."

—Eminem, page 56

## 56 EMINEM

Clean and sober and grappling with adulthood at the tender age of 37, the biggest-selling artist of the millennium wants his spot back. Plus: How five other post-rehab albums stack up.

BY JONAH WEINER

## 64 M.I.A.

She's been hailed as a visionary, admired as a provocateur, and derided as a hypocrite. What's the real story behind Maya Arulpragasam's revolutionary stance?

BY JOE DOLAN

## 70 WAVVES

From his onstage meltdown to his public battle with the Black Lips, Wavves' Nathan Williams has seen some dark days. But with his fine new album, there just might be sunshine on the other side.

BY MELISSA MAERZ

## 74 DEVO

Now offering *Something for Everyone*, the new-wave icons have returned with their first album in 20 years. Co-conspirators Mark Mothersbaugh and Jerry Casale give the secret history of the de-evolutionists in 24 bite-size morsels.

BY CHRIS WILLMAN

### ON THE COVER

Photographed by Maciek Kobielak. Grooming by Kayleen McAdams at the White Group. Styling by Malgorzata Wojtkowiak. Production by Christos Makrides. Accommodations provided by the Athenaeum Hotel.





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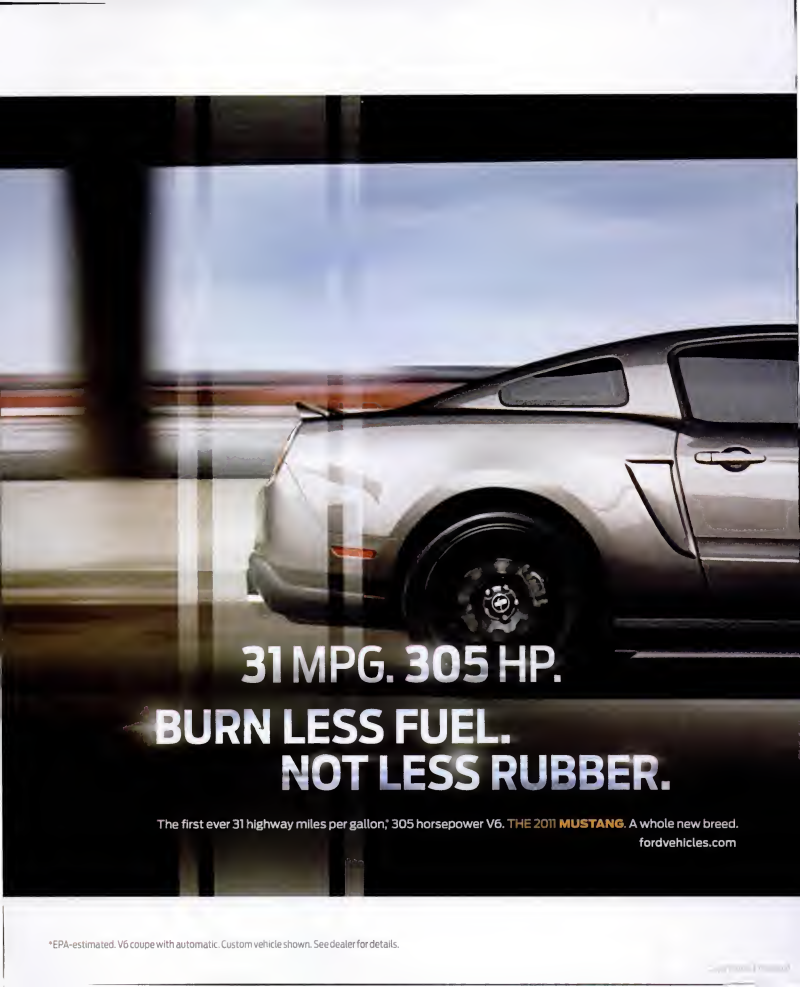


Ryan Sheckler wears his Signature Series Sideways™

You don't get an extremely successful pro skateboarding career, your own show on MTV and a pile of lucrative endorsement contracts by doing things somebody else's way. The good life of Ryan Sheckler has come from having a mind of his own and running things according to his vision. So when jealousy surfaces

as a backlash to all the good fortune, rather than letting the negativity bring him down, Ryan turns the haters into motivators by laughing with them. Here at Oakley, we have a lot in common with Ryan, bucking the expectations of how we should do it in favor of sticking to the program that got us to the top in the first place.





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# DEPARTMENTS

AUGUST 2010

"I WOULDN'T SAY IT'S MY MOST PERSONAL ALBUM. IT'S THE MOST GRAPHIC. TOO GRAPHIC."

—JP, *Chrissie & the Fatground Boys*' Chrissie Hynde, page 54



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In My Room: Pharrell Williams

The Inquisition: Buckcherry's Josh Todd

Breaking Out: The Henry Clay People, Giggs, and Die Antwoord

The SPIN Mix: Songs you must hear now!

Words of Wisdom: Chrissie Hynde and JP Jones

Plus: The Arizona rock boycott, Drake vs. The-Dream in a lyrical

battle, how the Sword made *Warp Riders*, listening in with Mary Elizabeth Winstead, and the SPIN 20

## 81 REVIEWS

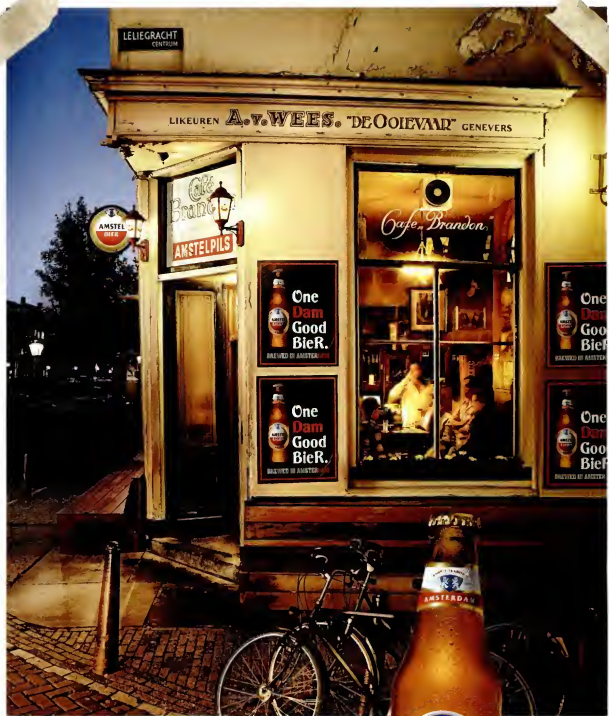
Music: Arcade Fire's *The Suburbs*, Big Boi's *Sir Lucious Left Foot: The Son of Chico Dusty*, the Love Language's *Libraries, Waves*, King of the Beach, the Sword's *Warp Riders*, !!!'s *Strange Weather*, Isrit It?, Paul Wall's *Heart of a Champion*, Best Coast's *Crazy for You*,

Ra Ra Riot's *The Orchard*, The-Dream's *Love King*, and dozens more!

Plus: Reissues and essential cowpunk  
Movies: *Life During Wartime*, *The Extra Man*, *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*, *Middle Men*, and *Mogwai's Burning*

## 96 ENCORE

August 18, 1977: The Buzzcocks sign up, Elvis signs off



*Leliegracht, Amsterdam 20:14*



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Dam  
Good  
Bier.**



## Cherry Lane's 50th Anniversary Celebration

BROOKLYN, NY  
May 19, 2010

The independent music publisher celebrated its 50th anniversary at Williamsburg hot spot Brooklyn Bowl, showcasing the best of past and present with performances by artists from their legendary roster. Newcomers Delta Spirit rocked the invite-only crowd early on before Grammy Award-winning recording artist John Legend showed things down with a soulful closing set.



Stylist Keino Benjamin and Jamie Hilliger

PHOTOGRAPHS BY OWEN TEGAN

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CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS Guy Aroch, Cass Bird, Steven Brahms, Francesco Carrozzini, Jimmy Fontaine, Viki Forshee, Nick Haymes, Frederike Helwig, Marc Hom, Daniel Jackson, Greg Kadel, Ture Lillegren, John Lindquist, Carlin Mayer, Terry Richardson, Michael Schmelling, Rebecca Smeyn, Christopher Sturman, Takay, Ellen Von Unwerth

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## SPIN FLASH

Passion Pit at New York City's Classic Car Club



The Ting Tings at the Alliance Center in New York City



## Microsoft Surprises Fans With KIN Spot Secret Shows

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May 8-27, 2010

Celebrating their newest social networking-empowered smart phone, KIN, Microsoft hosted a string of nationwide secret shows, surprising lucky fans from coast to coast with unannounced concerts by Passion Pit, the Ting Tings, and the Black Keys (in New York City); Yesayer, Asher Roth, and N.E.R.D. (in San Francisco); the Dead Weather (in Chicago); and Big Boi, Jay Electronica, and Yelawolf (in Atlanta).

Fashion Designer Prabal Gurung (center) and friends at the Ting Tings show



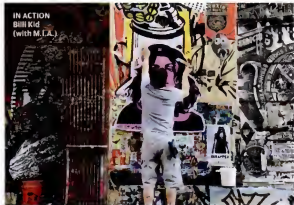
The Black Keys



Flashtodemo

Inside SPIN

## EDITOR'S LETTER

IN ACTION  
Billi Kid  
(with M.J.A.)

IN THIS ERA of safe, every-hair-in-place pop stars and overmanicured, underdressed pop starlets, it's refreshing to see and hear musicians still engaged in the art of meaningful provocation. And this month's lineup of feature stories is lousy with them.

In his first piece for the magazine, Jonah Weiner, who writes regularly for *Slate* and *The New York Times*, profiles a clean and sober, if not kinder and gentler, Eminem, for the rapper's seventh appearance on the cover of SPIN (Kurt Cobain holds the record at ten, FYI). He met with Eminem at his recording studio in the Detroit 'burbs, but when it came to tracking down his subject's childhood home, Weiner took a newfangled approach to traditional shoe-leather reporting. "I only knew it was on Dresden Street, not the street number," he says. "So I drove up and down the street two times, holding up my phone with the *Marshall Mathers LP* cover on the screen, comparing it to the houses I passed. People were staring at me, probably thinking, 'Look at this Eminem-loving idiot in the rental Kia.' They're probably used to it by now."

"Deconstructing M.J.A." finds Jon Dolan breaking down the forces that have shaped Maya Arulpragasam's art and life. To accompany the piece, we commissioned acclaimed street artist Billi Kid to create a portrait of the singer/designer/tastemaker as rebel leader Ché Guevara. "Like M.J.A., I often like to incorporate politics into my work," Kid says. "While her approach is more radicalized and direct, mine is tongue in cheek and ambiguous. Our connection lies in the fact that we both feel the need to keep the conversation alive." Go to SPIN.com/billikid for an inside look at the making of the image, which at press time was still posted on Wooster Street in Manhattan.

Also this month, a compact new feature called Words of Wisdom debuts, featuring Chrissie Hynde and her new star-crossed collaborator, JP Jones, in which the famously combative Pretenders frontwoman turns disarmingly—and even charmingly—coy. Some pop stars owe their careers to baring their souls and their demons. Others, not so much.

DOUG BROD



KIN PHOTOGRAPH BY BEN ROWLAND



## SPIN FLASH



Young Voids



Phoenix

### Jeremiah Weed Brings the Backyard to Bonnaroo 2010

MANCHESTER, TN  
June 10-13, 2010

Jeremiah Weed brought their newest Southern-style sweet tea flavored vodka cocktails to Bonnaroo 2010, inviting the festival's biggest and brightest bands to their backstage backyard for some good ol' Southern fun. Bands included the Black Keys, Phoenix, the Temper Trap, Fanfarlo, and Los Angeles stand-outs Local Natives and Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros. Check out exclusive front-porch interviews on SPIN.com from the Black Keys, Manchester Orchestra, and Mumford & Sons playing cornhole, jamming on banjos, and throwing back summer cocktails.



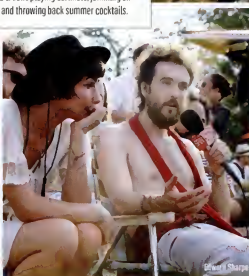
The Pentavers



Local Natives



The Temper Trap



Edward Sharpe



Margaret Cho

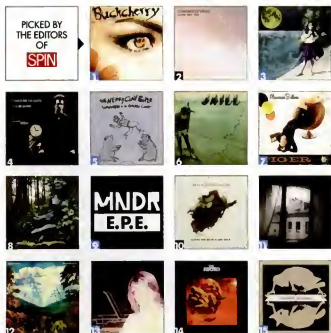


Manchester Orchestra

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# FREE MUSIC!

Go to [SPIN.COM/ITUNES](http://SPIN.COM/ITUNES) for 15 tracks representing the best of the August issue



1. BUCKCHERRY "All Night Long"
2. DEPARTMENT OF EAGLES "Brightest Minds"
3. FIRST AID KIT "Hard Believer"
4. FRANCIS AND THE LIGHTS "For Days"
5. HENRY CLAY PEOPLE "Slow Burn"
6. JAILL "The Stroller"
7. MAXIMUM BALLOON "Tiger" (feat. Aku)
8. MENOMENA "Five Little Rooms"
9. MNDR "Fade to Black"
10. MT. ST. HELENS VIETNAM BAND "Leaving Trails"
11. SUN KIL MOON "Australian Winter"
12. TAME IMPALA "Solitude Is Bliss"
13. THE LOVE LANGUAGE "Heart to Tell"
14. THE SWORD "Tres Brujas"
15. VILLAGERS "Becoming a Jackal"

Inside **SPIN**

## FEEDBACK

E-MAIL US AT [FEEDBACK@SPIN.COM](mailto:FEEDBACK@SPIN.COM)



New Wave was for the masses, White Crosses is for my mom and teenyboppers.

JOHNNY BOOTS  
via [spin.com](http://spin.com)

White Crosses is the result of a growing process Against Me! have been going through for the past 13 years. I have high hopes for their continuing journey.

ALICIA-MARIE  
via [spin.com](http://spin.com)

When I was younger, Against Me! was the best band in the world. Not anymore. At shows, you can tell that when Tom Gabel sings his old lyrics, he doesn't mean them. Rest in peace, rebellion.

EMERSON ROSENTHAL  
via [spin.com](http://spin.com)

### Jailhouse Rock

You can imagine my surprise when, upon arrival at the correctional facility where I currently reside, I found SPIN being sold at the commissary! I had meager funds in my account, so I was forced to decide between a toothbrush and the magazine. Naturally (much to my cellmate's chagrin), I chose SPIN.

DERRICK LEE  
Westland, Michigan

### Correction

An article about Band of Horses ["Festival Guide 2010: Band of Horses," June] incorrectly identified Ben Bridwell's favorite football team as the South Carolina State Bulldogs. He, in fact, prefers the Georgia Bulldogs.

### Flying High Again

Reading Stephen Elliott's story about Stone Temple Pilots ["A Band Apart," June], reminded me how tenuously most great bands exist. But the fact that STP are still here proves that they care about themselves, their fans, and their sound. Scott Weiland doesn't need to go out on the road. That he and the rest of the band chose to do so is both honorable and appreciated. But don't make us wait another nine years for a new album!

KEVIN BRAYLOR  
Waltham, Massachusetts

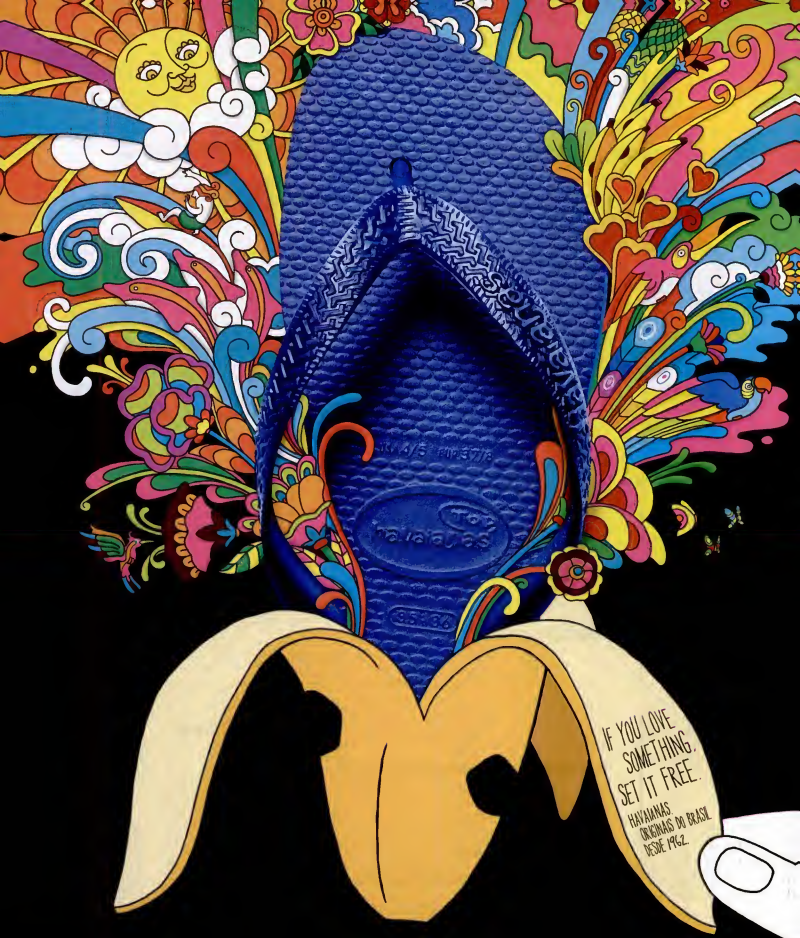
Glad to see your coverage of the Stone Temple Pilots. Guitarist Dean DeLeo is such a great guy and amazing spirit. I am so proud of the new album, knowing all the background stuff that happened during the band's hiatus.

ZUMA DOGG  
Los Angeles, California

### With 'Em or Against 'Em

Regarding the review of Against Me!'s *White Crosses* [June], if

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A mugshot of a man with a shaved head and a tattoo on his forehead. He is wearing a white tank top and has a serious expression. The background is dark.



ANSWERS: 1-A, 2-I, 3-B, 4-J, 5-C, 6-H, 7-G, 8-D, 9-E, 10-F)





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## SPIN FLASH

SweetGreen Presents  
SweetLife Festival 2010

WASHINGTON, D.C.

April 24, 2010

SweetLife and Rock the Vote joined forces, celebrating Earth Day 2010 with the first annual SweetLife Festival. Held in Washington, D.C., the daylong festival hosted educational workshops on agriculture, health, and nutrition, and entertained fans with live performances and an exclusive DJ set by electro-hitmakers Hot Chip. Proceeds from ticket sales were donated in support of the D.C. Farm to School Network.

[2] U.S. Royalty



[1] The Love Language



PHOTOGRAPHS BY: REAMY SWEET (1-3); SAKURA FINE (2)

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**SOUNDCHECK**

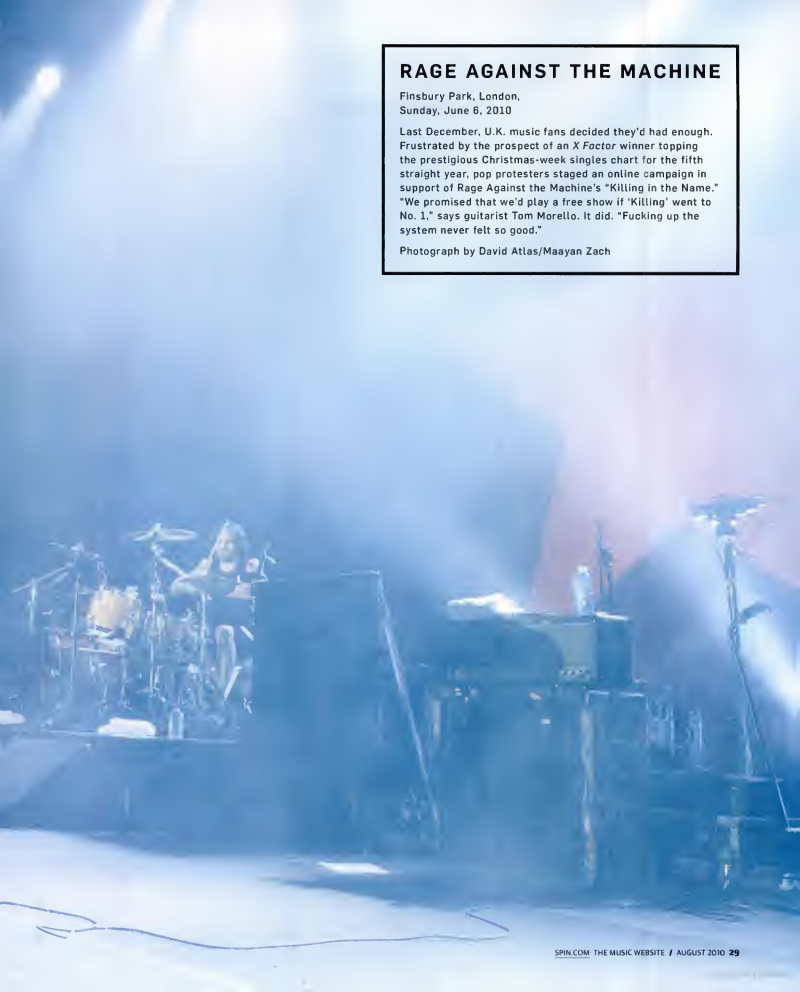


## RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Finsbury Park, London,  
Sunday, June 6, 2010

Last December, U.K. music fans decided they'd had enough. Frustrated by the prospect of an *X Factor* winner topping the prestigious Christmas-week singles chart for the fifth straight year, pop protesters staged an online campaign in support of Rage Against the Machine's "Killing in the Name." "We promised that we'd play a free show if 'Killing' went to No. 1," says guitarist Tom Morello. It did. "Fucking up the system never felt so good."

Photograph by David Atlas/Maayan Zach

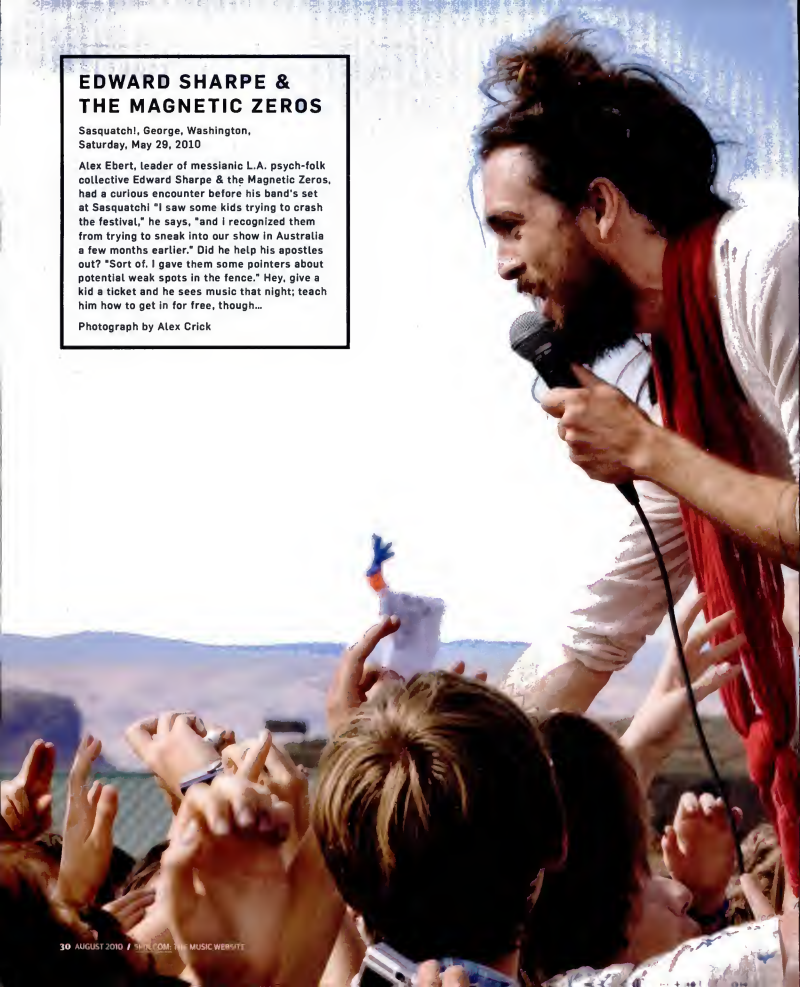


## EDWARD SHARPE & THE MAGNETIC ZEROS

Sasquatch!, George, Washington,  
Saturday, May 29, 2010

Alex Ebert, leader of messianic L.A. psych-folk collective Edward Sharpe & the Magnetic Zeros, had a curious encounter before his band's set at Sasquatch! "I saw some kids trying to crash the festival," he says, "and I recognized them from trying to sneak into our show in Australia a few months earlier." Did he help his apostles out? "Sort of. I gave them some pointers about potential weak spots in the fence." Hey, give a kid a ticket and he sees music that night; teach him how to get in for free, though...

Photograph by Alex Crick






# SOUNDCHECK

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## KINGS OF LEON

Bonnaroo, Manchester, Tennessee,  
Friday, June 11, 2010

"Ah, man," drawls Kings of Leon frontman Caleb Followill, "we've had a lot of moments that made us appreciate how crazy things have worked out for us, but this might've been the greatest. Headlining the main stage at Bonnaroo, 35 minutes from where we live, with all our friends and family there, and then having our minds blown by Stevie Wonder the next night. The whole thing was beautiful. It's what a homecoming is supposed to be."

Photograph by Noah Abrams

it's time for flavor,  
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to have a threesome  
(calories\* aren't invited.)



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THE ARIZONA ROCK BOYCOTT / DIE ANTWOORD / DRAKE VS. THE-DREAM / BUCKCHERRY'S JOSH TODD

## TIME TO SHINE

"Our new album is posh and bohemian all at once, kind of like *Sign o' the Times*," says N.E.R.D.'s Pharrell Williams. "It's about where our culture is now." For more, see page 38.



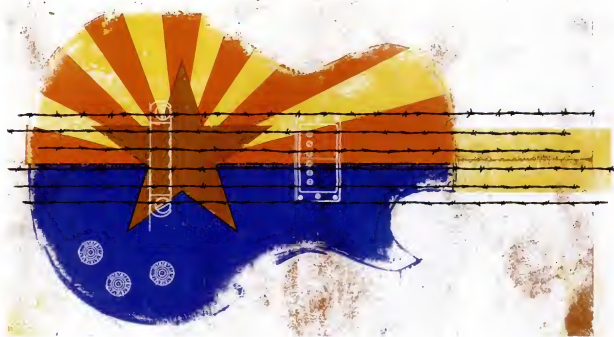
THE SELBY





# Should They Stay or Should They Go?

Musicians debate whether a boycott is the best way to protest Arizona's new immigration law



**C**URTIS MCCRARY, general manager of Tucson's 90-year-old Rialto Theatre, doesn't know how much longer he can last. Since Cypress Hill canceled a show at his venue in May to protest the controversial Arizona anti-illegal immigration law known as SB1070, which, pending legal challenges, was due to take effect this month, McCrary has seen about a half-dozen other bands drop the nonprofit theater from their touring plans. "It's been a drip, drip, drip thing," he says. "There's a very real possibility that it could drive us out of business."

So far, the most visible effect of efforts like Zack de la Rocha's Sound Strike—which has rallied such artists as Kanye West, Conor Oberst, and Massive Attack to avoid Arizona until SB1070 is off the

books—has been to frustrate the state's club owners, concert promoters, and music fans who oppose the law. But, boycotters say, pain has always been part of solidarity movements, ranging from Artists United Against Apartheid in the 1980s to the recent politically motivated shunning of Israel by the Pixies and Elvis Costello. "It's a combined voice saying we will not tolerate bigotry," says System of a Down singer Serj Tankian, who's aligned with Sound Strike. "Justice sometimes has to be served in putting aside profits."

SB1070, signed into law by Governor Jan Brewer in April, compels police to check the immigration status of anyone they've stopped if that person appears to be in the United States illegally. Critics, including the mayors of Los Angeles and Phoenix, have, respectively, orga-

nized a business boycott and filed lawsuits against the state, saying the law encourages harassment of Latinos and is unconstitutional. Polls show that a nationwide majority supports the measure, though.

"If these groups don't want to come here, fine, we'll bring someone else who will entertain us and take our money," says Republican Arizona State Senator Frank Antenori. "My decisions are made on what's the right thing to do, and the right thing to do is to enforce the law."

But there are those in Arizona's independent music scene who say there's a better way to fight the legislation. Weeks after the boycotts began, Joey Burns of Tucson-based mariachi-rockers Calexico and local talent bookers such as McCrary formed Viva Arizona, an organization

pushing bands to transform their Arizona concerts into voter-registration drives and anti-SB1070 demonstrations. "The boycott is not a bad step; it's the first step," Burns says. "The next step is to invite artists to come here to get people involved."

September brings with it Tucson's annual Hoco Fest, which this year features pro-immigration information booths, free admission, and stages headlined by Calexico, the Meat Puppets, and Robyn Hitchcock. For his part, Burns is hoping to get Sound Strike acts to show up, but that will take some convincing. "I've always regarded Arizona as semi-evil," says Kim Gordon of boycotting band Sonic Youth. "I don't know if the logic really pans out, but my gut reaction is: I don't want to go there. I don't want to celebrate Arizona." **SPENCER KORNHABER**



CALEXICO'S JOEY BURNS (RIGHT)



SONIC YOUTH'S KIM GORDON, MASSIVE ATTACK'S ROBERT DEL NAJA, SYSTEM OF A DOWN'S SERJ TANKIAN



FROM LEFT: TONY NELSON/RETNA, JACIE BUTLER/RETNA, THOMAS HEDERHOLM/RETNA, MACEY BRIAN/RETNA/USA

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## N.E.R.D.'s label-loving **Pharrell Williams** opens the doors to his Miami mansion



### About Our Host

According to Pharrell, he and fellow N.E.R.D. members Chad Hugo and Shae Haley have gone haute concept on *Nothing* (Star Trak/Interscope), due September 7. "The album is designed as a roundtable conversation between us and a bunch of girls about the good things and the bad things in life," he says. "The fruits of that fictional summit can be tasted on frisky first single 'Hot-N-Fun,' featuring Nelly Furtado. 'That's what the girls want,' he concedes. "They want what's hot and fun."

Shot for SPIN in Miami, May 25, 2010

- 1 **Kaws Companion statue** "[Kaws designer] Brian Donnelly had done some work for Nigo [A Bathing Ape fashion house founder Tomoaki Nagao], who runs my Billionaire Boys Club clothing line with me. He had this ten-foot statue, *Companion*, in the original Kaws store in Tokyo. I wanted the same thing for my place, so Brian did these smaller editions and sent me one."
- 2 **Baby Milo statue** "Baby Milo is a sub-line of Bathing Ape. I think the character is so iconic. I love the ideology behind BAPE. I like that it's so youthful but, at the same time, has relevance to all ages. Nigo is a genius."
- 3 **Perspective chair** "I designed that two years ago with [furniture designers] Dorneau & Pérès. [Parisian art gallery owner] Emmanuel Perrotin was having a show of their stuff and asked if I wanted to design a chair with them. I gave him my sketches and the rest was history."
- 4 **Twin tree lamps** "They came with the house. I thought that they were artistically interesting and also had functionality so I kept them. The house once belonged to [Miami real estate mogul] Ugo Colombo. I don't know much about him, but he had good taste."
- 5 **Kaws Stewie portrait** "Stewie [from *Family Guy*] is just a funny character. That little toddler with the accent and the things he says, it's always so honest. I'm also a big *SpongeBob* fan."
- 6 **Sperry Top-Siders** "Sperry is a good brand. Their collaboration with [fashion label] Band of Outsiders was cool—I got a couple pairs. You can't really dance in them, though. They're just flat and comfortable."
- 7 **Kubrick Coco Chanel doll** "I like all things Chanel. But I have a bunch of Kubrick dolls. I have their Warhol and Beatles dolls, too. I love how they express personality through a doll."
- 8 **Kaws Brian portrait** "I love the *Family Guy* sensibility. I've lived in a lot of different areas and the show reminds me of so many families I know. It's really honest Americana. And Brian says what dogs are probably thinking."
- 9 **Louis Vuitton luggage** "I started collecting Vuitton cases ten years ago. My interest comes from being from a world where I didn't understand what Vuitton was and not having anything like that. Nigo gave me tips on which ones to look for. He has a bigger collection than I do."
- 10 **Moroso chair** "I also bought that when I bought the house. When I was looking for a spot in Miami, a friend of mine told me about this place and I saw it. My next question was 'When can I move in?'"

BY JOHN HOOD  
PHOTOGRAPH BY THE SELBY



# Mary Elizabeth Winstead, the object of Michael Cera's affection in *Scott Pilgrim vs. the World*, on the soundtrack to her life

## What was the last concert you attended?

I went to see Bat for Lashes in Toronto. It was mesmerizing. [Scott Pilgrim director] Edgar Wright had sent me "What's a Girl to Do?" and I became completely obsessed with the video of her on the bike with the boys in bunny costumes. **Which of your costars had the best taste in music?** Brie Larson and I connected over French pop. She was really into Brigitte Bardot and Serge Gainsbourg, and I had just discovered France Gall. **Who would you like to portray in a rock biopic?** Fiona Apple. I'm a singer and I'd like to do "Never Is a Promise."

**What's the first album you bought with your own money?** Alanis Morissette's *Jagged Little Pill*. When I was in fifth grade, I thought I was 17, I have memories of listening to "You Oughta Know" on the radio and knowing the "Are you thinking of me when you blank her?" part was coming up and trying to switch the station really fast. The embarrassment of hearing those words in the presence of your parents is the worst. **Name the band that comes after Radiohead on your iPod.**

The Raincoats. **Who would we be surprised to learn is in your collection?** mewwithoutYou. My boyfriend and I met on a cruise when we were 18 and bonded over their second album, especially "Nice and Blue, Pt. 2." We're getting married in October. **What song will you dance to at the wedding?** I've been shopping for music from the '50s and '60s, like the Shangri-Las, the Shirelles, and Roy Orbison. I really love Ben E. King, so I think one of the slow dances will be "Stand by Me." **Name a song you listened to in the past 24 hours.** "Crystallised." I thought I was the only one who knew about the xx, but they caught on so quickly I feel like I'm late getting on the bandwagon.

**Who's the most controversial artist that you've ever been a fan of?** Madonna. I was nine when her *Erotica* album came out, and my friends and I had a little group that we named "Erotica" even though we had no idea what it meant. We were like, "It's pretty, it's cool, it's erotica." PHOEBE REILLY



## THE ALBUM RECIPE

The Sword's J.D. Cronise reveals how the Texas metalheads cooked up *Warp Riders*

10 songs about warring planets



1 ZZ Top cover band formed to blow off steam during downtime



1 copy of *Dune*



1 marijuana vaporizer emblazoned with the band's logo



15 guitars



3 months at an Austin recording studio



Warp Riders

"Just because *Warp Riders* is a concept album doesn't mean it's a complete departure for us. The songs aren't about severed heads and bloody wars—they're more in the vein of Heavy Metal magazine with classical Greek themes and androids and spaceships. Anybody expecting power chords and guitar solos isn't going to be disappointed."



## TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR

## JOSH TODD

While Buckcherry singer Josh Todd can't claim the same dizzying success as fellow rock frontmen Axl Rose and Scott Weiland, he does share a unique bond with them: He's been in a band with Slash. During a break from Buckcherry—whose excess-endorsing 1999 single "Lit Up" became a staple in pickup trucks everywhere—Todd teamed up with Guns N' Roses vets Slash, Duff McKagan, and Matt Sorum to perform at a 2002 benefit as Cherry Roses. But after jamming for the next month, Todd's role in the project, which later became Velvet Revolver, fizzled. "Some things work out, some things don't," says the 39-year-old. "But there wasn't a lot of drama." Instead, he re-formed Buckcherry, and this month the band will release *All Night Long*, its fifth raucous studio album. Todd called us from a go-kart track in Southern California. Yes, a go-kart track.

"We wanted to write a rock'n'roll anthem. There's a huge void in rock for songs you can chant at the top of your lungs."

The album's first single is a rocker titled "All Night Long." Big Lionel Richie fan, are you? I didn't even think about that, actually. That's funny. He's a great songwriter.

Obviously, the two songs couldn't be much more different, both musically and lyrically. We just wanted to write a rock'n'roll anthem. There's a huge void in rock music for songs you can chant at the top of your lungs. Songs for when you go to a house party in high school and put them in and just go to the keg and get hammered. When I was growing up, *Back in Black* and *Appetite for Destruction* were the records that got played at parties. But right now it seems like nobody is fuckin' having a good time.

The second track on the album is called "It's a Party." I'm sensing a trend here. That one's about celebration and having a good time. So many people are bitching about a not-so-bad life. It's silly. It's time to just fuckin' have a good time, because life is short.

I take it "Lit Up" still applies to you, then? No, I haven't gotten lit up for a long time. I've been sober for 15 years.

Interesting. So when you sang, "I love the cocaine," you were actually drug-free? I partied for a good part of my life, and that song is about the very first time I did cocaine. I don't know why people would have an issue with it. If I was writing about some girl I dated in high school and I was not with her anymore, it's the same thing. I had a relationship with drugs and alcohol—a very, very passionate relationship. I'm in a different part of my life now, but I always like to go back to that with my lyrics.

Don't most Buckcherry fans expect you to be a party animal, though? People think that I'm loaded a lot. They come up to me and say, "Yeah, man—remember last time when we were drinking?" And I let them have their little fantasy. But I know what's going on with myself, you know?

Why did you decide to quit drinking and taking drugs? I was a very, very bad alcoholic from age 13 to 23. I was a blackout drinker. I also smoked

weed like cigarettes. Took a lot of LSD. Cocaine. A lot of speed.

Amazing. How difficult was it to kick the drugs? It was one of the biggest challenges of my life—and one of the greatest assets. Before that, I couldn't really show up for anything. So, without sobriety, I wouldn't even be talking to you.

You toured with Kiss last year. Did you engage in at least a little debauchery with them? It was anything but that, really. We had conflicting schedules, because Kiss were flying every night and we were on the bus. So we never really hung out. But those guys are way past that.

Gene Simmons is nearly 61, I guess. Does Mötley Crüe, with whom you toured in 2008, still bring in groupies at this point? Oh, yeah, Mötley Crüe brought them in. But it was their generation groupies, so they were all cougars to us. But it was fun. We'd all hang out every night, and it was just a big fuckin' love fest.

Buckcherry was originally called Sparrow. Considering how wussy songbirds are, are you glad that name didn't stick? Looking back, yes. But a name is what you make it. We thought it was cool, because the sparrow is kind of the mutt of the songbirds. There's nothing really unique or special about sparrows. And we were just fuckin' scumbags. So we liked that.

You've dabbled in acting, including, ridiculously, a role as yourself in *The Banger Sisters*. How did that even happen? Somehow Buckcherry got asked to be the band in the movie. I also do a small scene with Goldie Hawn. I'm getting my dick sucked in the parking lot after the show, and she comes up to tell me that she liked the show and then she notices I'm getting my dick sucked and she leaves.

They nailed the life of a rock'n'roll frontman, I'm sure. I assume you've even banged sisters? I haven't, I have to admit. I mean, I suppose it is possible because I used to black out a lot, but I just don't recall ever being in that situation. I would like to say I did, but what are you going to do?



# Gentlemen Ballers

Twin pillars of tongue-twisting excellence, Drake and The-Dream rule their respective rap and R&B roosts. But as evidenced on the former's *Thank Me Later* (Aspire/Young Money/Cash Money), which features the two tag-teaming on "Shut It Down," and the latter's *Love King* (Def Jam), these ladies' men aren't immune from spitting the occasional head-scratching rhyme—often about the same subject.

We put them side by side for a lyrical throwdown. BY KENNY HERZOG



DRAKE

VS.



THE-DREAM

## BEDROOM BOASTS

### THE SONG

Fancy

### THE METAPHOR

"Asses off the hook / Cinderella 'bout to lose the glass off her foot / And when I find it, is when I find you / And we can do the things we never got the time to"

### THE SONG

Sex Intelligent

### THE METAPHOR

"You can't match a love like mine / It's like trying to rob me with a BB gun / But my love gets it popping like the Taliban"

## FEMININE WILES

### THE SONG

Fancy

### THE PREFERENCE

"I know we're gonna be here a while / In the bathroom, flat irons and nail files / Spendin' hours in salons on your hairstyle / Or in the mall steady rackin' up the air miles"

### THE SONG

All Black Everything

### THE PREFERENCE

"Put a run in your black stockings / Sweat the eyeliner out / Apply it again / Jet black hair / Falling down her back / All up on her baby fat like trains on a track"

## THE COMPETITION

### THE SONG

Light Up

### THE PUT-DOWN

"I grow tired of these fuckin' grown-man liars / Storytellers / They don't even need a campfire"

### THE SONG

Sex Intelligent

### THE PUT-DOWN

"I make every nigga irrelevant / I'm sex intelligent"

## AN EMBARRASSMENT OF RICHES

### THE SONG

Fireworks

### THE BOAST

"Me and my realtor / We built up a better rapport / Got my mother in a place / With some better décor"

### THE SONG

February Love

### THE BOAST

"Thirty-foot ceilings / Lifestyle appealing / Check my '09 taxes / I made a killing"

## PRODUCT PLACEMENT

### THE SONG

Light Up

### THE SHILL

"I been up for four days gettin' money both ways / Dirty and clean / I could use a glass of cold space / Rolexes, chauffeurs, and low faders"

### THE SONG

Love King

### THE SHILL

"I got girls on the Nuvo / Girls on Patrón / Girls on that Belvedere pay me for this song / Got girls on my Sprint / My AT&T / Got girls on T-Mobile / Metro if it local"

## SAY WHAT?

### THE SONG

Over

### THE TANGENT

"But I really can't complain / Everything is kosher / Two thumbs up / Ebert and Roeper"

### THE SONG

Florida University

### THE TANGENT

"We look so hood together, shawty / Now you hate me, shawty / Later, shawty / What rhyme with asshole, shawty? / Asshole, shawty"

THE SPIN 20

Ranking on Pop Culture Since 1998

- 1 Soundgarden, Lady Gaga headline Lollapalooza Finally, a chance to wear our flannel machine-gun bra
- 2 Sly Stallone, Dolph Lundgren, and Mickey Rourke star in *The Expendables* Jean-Claude Van Damme, Steven Seagal, and Chuck Norris: The Expendoblers coming soon to DVD
- 3 Our air conditioner's insanity-inducing buzzing Duct tape is useless—and hard to get out of our ears
- 4 Brian Wilson completes unfinished George Gershwin songs Wherein a lowly New York City teen leaves the schmaltz trade behind for California, surfing, and a ton of acid
- 5 Tenth anniversary deluxe release of Sum 41's *All Killer No Filler* Now with added filler
- 6 Arcade Fire play two nights at Madison Square Garden Apparently bridge-and-tunnels appreciate *The Suburbs*
- 7 65th anniversary of V-J Day if we can't call it "Yagino Day," then what were we even fighting for?
- 8 Iron Maiden's *The Final Frontier* The best "goes to space" concept since *Leprechaun 4*
- 9 National Clown Week starts August 1 Let's all go to the party in my car!
- 10 Neil Armstrong turns 80 "Yeah, like six months after me," snorts Buzz Aldrin
- 11 Emerson, Lake, & Palmer four-CD live rarities box set *A Time and a Place* "Bitches Crystal" never sounded so...long
- 12 Gathering of the Juggalos The most dangerous place in the world to mispronounce Faygo
- 13 *Eat, Pray, Love* Of course, honey, I didn't want to see *The Expendables* anyway. Say, some of the guys are getting together later for poker...no, you're right, the garage does need sweeping.
- 14 The Deepwater Horizon leak Would have never happened if they hadn't sent out advances
- 15 Katy Perry's *Teenage Dream* So we're both naked in math class?
- 16 Creepy auto-complete results when you start typing an innocent question in Google's search box Depressingly enlightening
- 17 *Go Go Dolls' "Something for the Rest of Us* Define "us"
- 18 Arizona immigration law takes effect Enjoy your home stands, Hispanic members of the Diamondbacks
- 19 Thompson the office bulldog Cutesies offset by occasional land mines
- 20 Happy belated Arbor Day Couldn't find a card

FROM LEFT: ASTOR SWANWICK/GETTY IMAGES; WALKER GOSHORN/RETNA



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DAN BLACK  
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THESE UNITED STATES  
THE ETTES  
JUKEBOX THE GHOST  
MY DEAR DISCO  
SEMI PRECIOUS WEAPONS  
NEON TREES

**SATURDAY, AUGUST 7<sup>TH</sup>**  
MYNAMEISJOHNMICHAEL  
SKYBOX  
DRAGONETTE  
DAN BLACK  
ROYAL BANGS

**SUNDAY, AUGUST 8<sup>TH</sup>**  
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# THE HENRY CLAY PEOPLE

Penny-pinching brothers rely on roadwork and ragged anthems to stay out of the red



Jonathan Price, Joey Siara, Andy Siara, Eric Scott, and Jordan Hudock: shot for *Spin* in Glendale, California, June 7, 2010

In the last year, the members of the Henry Clay People have played Lollapalooza, toured the West Coast with Drive-by Truckers, and signed to the same label as Radiohead. So they're living the high life, right? "Actually, I had to sell a guitar today to make my credit card payment," says guitarist Andy Siara, 24, from his apartment in L.A.'s Glendale suburb. Luckily, the buyer was Joey Siara, his 27-year-old brother, and the Henry Clay People's frontman. And since Joey's broke, too, there's a good chance Andy will be able to buy back his instrument before the next bill is due.

Formed in 2006, and named for the 19th-century Whig statesman, the Henry Clay People specialize in raggedy power chords, barreling piano, and desperately boyish vocals—what Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers would sound like if they'd taken temp work and listened obsessively to Crazy Horse. "End of an Empire" and "Working Part Time," from the band's third album, *Somewhere on the Golden Coast* (TBD Records), are kinetic celebrations of the purgatory occupied by rudderless twentysomethings and fortysomethings alike. "Job security isn't what it should be," says Joey, who only recently quit his gig as a tour guide for the Gene Autry Museum of the American West. "I have friends who went to law school, and a lot of them are in limbo now."

The band members helped shore themselves up this summer, when the Siaras—along with bassist Jonathan Price, 35, drummer Eric Scott, 27, and pianist Jordan Hudock, 30—toured as openers for Silversun Pickups and Against Me! In August, the quintet starts a new jaunt that includes a gig at Austin City Limits. That should keep the brothers out of hock. If not, could they hit up a coworker for a loan? "The label will make sure we're far away from Thom Yorke," laughs Joey. "We'd probably geek out too much."

BY BRIAN RAFTERY // PHOTOGRAPH BY MIKE PISCITELLI

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## GIGGS

Gritty U.K. MC runs afoul of the law while racking up guest spots from the Streets and B.o.B

**T**ypically, a rapper waits to blow up before branching into retail, but London's Giggs knows firsthand the value of having a fallback plan. "I've got enough people hoping I'll fail that I need to be smart with my business," says the 27-year-old, who since early 2009 has run a shop selling mixtapes and his own SNI clothing line in the rough Peckham neighborhood where he grew up. "That's why I opened the store. I need to be able to support my music if everything else goes away."

The everything else Giggs—born Nathan Thompson—is referring to is a burgeoning career that, in the two years since he released his first mixtape (the menacing *Walk in Da Park*), has seen him win Best U.K. Hip-hop act at the 2008 BET Awards and draw praise from the Streets' Mike Skinner, who appeared on the uncharacteristically mournful 2009 track "Slow Songs." Giggs also notched his first charting U.K. single this past February with the fatalistic "Don't Go There," featuring B.o.B. He followed that success with the June release of his official full-length debut, the alternately bleak and boastful *Let Em Ave It* (XL). There, on sneering street dramas like "Ner Ner" and "All I Know," the MC uses his sour molasses flow to slip stories about selling coke and doing time into the spaces between stentorian Jeezy-esque synth hooks and tense, jump beats. "Rick Ross is bigger to me than Dizzee Rascal," says Giggs. "My music is more gangsta rap than anything English."

Maybe too much so. A March U.K. tour was canceled after police warned promoters about security concerns, and the store (also called SNI) has been raided multiple times. "England has a different view of rappers like me than America does," says an undaunted Giggs, who began rapping seriously while serving a two-year prison term for a gun conviction. ("I had to do something in there," he shrugs.) "In America, people will look past a criminal record. In England, they try and shut you up."

Having tentatively planned a U.S. tour for early 2011, the immediate future seems secure for Giggs, but he's not taking any chances. "I understand how quickly life can change," he says, "which is why I've got to do what I want to do."

BY DAVID MARCHESSE  
PHOTOGRAPH BY RONALD DICK

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# DIE ANTWOORD

Inspired by taxis and techno, bizarre South African rave-rappers ride viral video to major label deal



**G**iven that Cape Town-based rap provocateurs Die Antwoord's introduction to the world came via a freaky video featuring a muscle-bound progeria sufferer and a suspiciously young-looking blonde's striptease, it's not surprising that the band's frontman, Ninja, was worried his first visit to the United States would end before it began. "I thought the customs guy wouldn't let us in," says the MC, recalling the trio's journey to Los Angeles last April to play Coachella, "but then he asked for my autograph."

It was a long, strange trip for Ninja, vocalist Yo-Landi Visser, and DJ Hi-Tek to reach fanboy recognition. Born Watkin Jones, Ninja scuffled for years in South Africa's music scene—hanging with rappers and smoking weed with Rastas—before getting in on an idea that could travel. "In 2006, Yo-Landi thought to throw in rave shit with my rap shit. Hi-Tek added his next-level beats and it felt perfect. Since then, we're only interested in being as crazy new as possible on a daily basis."

Christened Die Antwoord ("The Answer" in Afrikaans) and inspired by

the bass-heavy techno blaring from Cape Town's taxis and the bumper stickers adorning those same cars (e.g., "Famine or feast / When you're living on the razor edge"), the band posted the aforementioned video, for stroboscopic banger "Enter the Ninja," to YouTube in January 2010. Displaying Visser cavorting on a bed and tiny South African visual artist Leon Botha (he of the progeria) lip-synching, the self-financed clip earned millions of views as well as speculation about the group's authenticity.

"People thought we were a joke

because we got noticed so fast," says Visser. "Interscope e-mailed us a week after the video went up. They obviously took us seriously."

Signed to a five-album deal, with a New York City appearance at July's M.I.A.-headlined Hard festival behind them and debut album *10\$* due later this year, Die Antwoord aren't about to clear up any confusion. "We don't care if you understand us," says Ninja. "We just want you to play our music fucking loud."

BY DAVID MARCHESE  
PHOTOGRAPH BY CLAYTON CUBITT



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# Songs You Must Hear Now!

**1. Tame Impala "Solitude Is Bliss"** So the singer says, "You will never come close to how I feel" then the far-out rhythm and lava-lamp guitar licks in and you just, like, know.

**2. Crocodiles "Sleep Forever"** San Diego hipster agitators add a dose of Oasis' stolid melodic grandeur to their cheeky Jesus and Mary Chain pastiche.

**3. Wild Nothing "Chinatown"** Wispy indie-pop escapism, as endearingly bleary frontman Jack Tatum coos, "We're not happy till we're running away."

**4. Kid Cudi "REVOFEV"** A clearly baked Cudi infectiously prattles while he strolls producer Plain Pat's mesmerizing psych-pop promenade.

**5. Lissie "Pursuit of Happiness"** Female singer-guitarist grabs Kid Cudi's bewildered musing by the

throat, and gives his "night terrors" a fierce roar.

**6. First Aid Kit "Hard Believer"** Swedish teen sisters unspool earthy Dylan melodies and sylvan harmonies on this blooming breakup ballad.

**7. Mark Ronson, feat. Q-Tip and MNDR "Bang Bang Bang"** Ronson dials up a suavely peacocking club beat while Q-Tip essays life on the velvet grind and MNDR takes the nursery-rhyme chorus frolicking underground.

**8. Washed Out, feat. Caroline Polachek "You and I"** One long soft-focus, Truffaut fare-well gaze with synth sprinkles streaking the windshield.

**9. The Vaselines "I Hate the 80's"** Indie-pop potty mouths happily piss all over your MTV romanticizing of the decade in question's repressive shit show.

**10. Jamey Johnson "Macon"** Someplace, Ronnie Van Zant and Waylon Jennings are raisin' a shot to the first man in ages to make country music rock balls.

**11. Villagers "Ship of Promises"** A martial boom sends ravenous Irish emoter Conor O'Brien off to sea, sailing deso-

late guitar twang and tense strings toward a broken heart.

**12. James Blake "CMYK"** London producer-singer rips and tucks and clicks and cuts late-'90s R&B like an elegantly ecstatic cosmetic surgeon.

**13. Troop 41 "Do the John Wall"** A would-be Southern Pharcyde, this scrappy Raleigh trio pays

tribute to local hero/future NBA point guard nonpareil.

**14. Drake "The Resistance"** Unlike Kanye justifying his flaws in a glitzy huff, Drake opens hip-hop to utter emotional confusion, babbling confessions over fluttering beats.

**15. Maximum Balloon, feat. Aku "Tiger"** TV on the Radio's Dave Sitek dons James Murphy's VSL disco gear and drops an anxious cowbell strut.



## Tame Impala

**Home base:** Perth, Australia

**Began:** 2007 **Influences:** "60s and '70s rock, like Hendrix, Zeppelin, and the Groundhogs, the Chemical Brothers are in there too," says Kevin Parker, singer-guitarist for the hypnotically trippy foursome. **Sound like:** "Psychedelic rock played with an electronic music feel." **Latest release:** *Innerspeaker* (Modular)

## MNDR

**Home base:** New York City

**Began:** 2008 **Influences:** "Cold krautrock, Detroit techno, and IDM" were the biggies for MNDR, the nom de dance of singer-beatmaker Amanda Warner. **Sounds like:** "The feeling you get from either extreme heartbreak or an amazing party. And it's catchy." **Latest release:** *E.P.E.* EP (self-released)

## Villagers

**Home base:** Malahide, Ireland

**Began:** 2008 **Influences:** "Hermann Hesse's novel *Narzissus und Goldmund* inspired a lot of my writing," says main Villager Conor O'Brien. "Neil Young, Nina Simone, and Motown also gave me some ideas." **Sound like:** "Melodic, folk-centered soul rock/roll." **Latest release:** *Becoming a Jackal* (Domino)





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# CHRISSIE HYNDE AND JP JONES

The Pretenders mainstay and her new collaborator (maybe) kiss and (sorta) tell

**O**n an oppressively humid evening in May, Pretenders frontwoman/vegan restaurant proprietor Chrissie Hynde takes the stage at a cozy SoHo bookstore with 31-year-old singer-songwriter JP Jones. For the first time in three decades, Hynde has formed a new band—JP, Chrissie & the Fairground Boys—and tonight's semisecret charity event is one of a series of U.S. shows to promote their debut album, *Fidelity* (released this month on La Mina/Rocket Science). "I love you Chrissie!" shouts an apparently inebriated female fan. She receives a smile in response, but then loudly demands that legendarily temperamental Hynde reciprocate. "I said, 'Thank you,'" Hynde snaps. "What the fuck else am I supposed to say?"

Unbowed, her admirer lets out an encouraging hoot when Hynde arrives at the chorus of their fourth song, "Perfect Lover": "I found my perfect lover but he's only half my age / He was learning how to stand when I was wearing my first wedding band." It's no coincidence that the buff, suntanned, tank-top-sporting Jones would have been toddling around his native Wales in the '80s when Hynde, now 59, was with the Kinks' Ray Davies and then married to Simple Minds' Jim Kerr.

So now you get the joke.

**"This album is about something that can't happen,"** explains Hynde two days later. Dressed in a T-shirt and her signature skinny jeans, she rolls a cigarette on the sofa of her hotel suite, which smells strongly of the incense she was burning earlier. Jones sits beside her, but Hynde makes haste to mention that he has his own room. She continues: "I'm too old to be JP's wife and give him children, and that's basically what he wants. **We wrote these songs to get it out of our system."**

The unlikely pair met two years ago while boozing it up at an art party in London, where the Ohio native has lived for the past 37 years. She was in the midst of a Pretenders tour for their acclaimed ninth album, *Break Up the Concrete*. Jones had been playing with brawny British rockers Big Linda (the majority of whom are currently doubling as the Fairground Boys) after his band Grace—once touted as the next Snow Patrol—got dropped from EMI. "My management company wanted me to wear vests and dye my hair," says Jones, who now proudly points to the sparse grays gathering around his temples. Hynde interjects: **"JP allowed himself to be manipulated because he wants to please all the time. Whereas I'm very ready to say fuck off."**

Jones proposed the idea of writing music together, but Hynde was initially skeptical. "My first thought was 'I'm on the way out, I've become nothing,'" says Hynde. "That wouldn't bode well for a young artist." Jones, who grew up with a poster of his current collaborator circa 1994's *Last of the Independents* on the wall of his boarding-school dorm, didn't share her concern. He readily admits, **"I'm getting brought into this by the fucking queen of rock!"**

In April 2009, the two decamped to Havana for a week, but as for what exactly transpired there, it depends on whom you ask. "My sister said I went away a boy and came back a man," says Jones, glancing at a poker-faced Hynde. Her version: **"We ate rice and beans, drank wine, and wrote songs on napkins."** The official story is *Fidelity*, a collection of lovesick rock songs, a few of which speed forth with the savvy of early Pretenders hits, though most announce their intensity with fervent pianos and some tambourine rustling. On the sentimental slow-build of "Australia," Hynde, with the fragile arrogance of a 1940s actress, sings, "Mostly, guys like you say goodbye to me." Jones' husky reply comes on the spare, Cohen-esque acoustic number "Leave Me If You Must": "I'm secretly embroiled in a burning hot desire / I wish that you could see me in a future life or in a former time."

"I wouldn't say it's my most personal album," says Hynde. "It's the most graphic. Too graphic. I can tell the audience is looking at us like: Are we going to kiss? Are we going to go home together? **You can come to the show, but you're not getting in a cab with me."**

Since questions about their relationship tend to strike Hynde as invasive, I ask her why she embarked on this project at all. "I've been so faithful to the Pretenders ethic, probably above and beyond the call of duty, because I lost two members in one year, and as a tribute to them I wanted to keep the music alive," she explains, referring to the 1982 overdoses of founding members James Honeyman Scott and Pete Farndon. "I dare say the Pretenders got too polite at moments. I never thought I'd be in a collaborative thing with another singer, but now I can come back with a whole new band and not be pigeon-holed in the thing people expect me to do."

Though she says this is in no way the end of her main gig, Hynde has found a future partner in Jones. They formed the record label La Mina ("animal" spelled backwards) and plan to launch a vegan clothing line in the fall. "We'll be together forever in some way or another," says Jones.

Hynde smiles, but adds, **"Well, you can't have the same muse all your life. Usually, it's a finite period."**




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Chrissie Hynde and  
JP Jones, shot for  
SPIN in New York  
City, May 28, 2010

A full-page photograph of a man with short dark hair and numerous tattoos on his arms. He is wearing a black tank top and has his hands in his pockets. He is looking down and to his left. He is standing in front of a large window that looks out onto a dry, outdoor landscape with trees and a fence. The lighting is warm and golden, suggesting late afternoon or early morning. The overall mood is contemplative and artistic.

# HAPPY DAYS



One year after his comeback album, the recharged **EMINEM**'s ferocious follow-up not only puts his infamous pill addiction behind him, it might just make him hip-hop's alpha dog all over again. So why isn't this man smiling?

By JONAH WEINER Photographs by MACIEK KOBIELSKI

Shot for SPIN in Detroit, May 26, 2010





As tourist attractions go, 19946 Dresden Street doesn't look like much. A squat, brick-faced house on the east side of Detroit, its front yard is a rectangle of dry soil, flecked with trash and tufts of grass. At just past 11 on a sunny Tuesday morning, a woman in her late 20s named Sierra is standing on the front porch, scanning the street, holding her infant daughter on her hip.

"People come by here all the time," Sierra says. Her voice is low and friendly, and she wears a small stud in her nose. Some time after she moved in three years ago, she says, she discovered a bit of trivia about the place: This is the house where Eminem spent his teenage years, the house he put on the cover of 2000's *The Marshall Mathers LP*, and the house his mom claims he used to carry around with him in the form of a tiny, specially commissioned replica. The listing practically writes itself: HOUSE FOR SALE, 2BR, 767 SQUARE FEET, EMINEM'S "ROSEBUD."

"They come from all over," Sierra says. "They take pictures, ask questions." Several visitors have tried to buy the house—one offered \$56,000, another \$72,000—but she likes it too much to consider selling. A neighbor once told her that, years ago, when the place was uninhabited, she broke in, found boxes full of the teenage Marshall Mathers' stuff, and sold it on eBay. "I don't know where she is now," Sierra says, nodding toward the boarded-up house to the left of hers.

Among the people who have flocked to Dresden Street to commune with the ghost of Eminem is Eminem himself. Every so often, he'll climb into one of his cars—sometimes during the day, sometimes at night, sometimes with security, sometimes alone—and drive down from his home in the northern suburbs to look at various places he grew up: the house on Fairport Avenue, the one on Novara Street, the one here on Dresden. He likes to creep by, do a U-turn, and make a second pass. Occasionally, residents spot him through his tinted windows and shout, "What up, Em?"

"Those neighborhoods aren't that far from where I live now," Eminem says. It's a few hours after my visit with Sierra, and the 37-year-old rapper and I are in the ultramodern recording studio in suburban Detroit where he's finishing *Recovery*, his seventh album, much of which was recorded here on an enormous mixing board he bought from his mentor, Dr. Dre. His

face lean, bordering on gaunt, Eminem sits in a leather rolling chair in a plain white T-shirt, dark, baggy jeans, and white Nike Air Max 92s, leaning forward with his hands folded.

The last time he went by 19946 Dresden, he says, was a year and a half ago, and a side window was boarded up. "I didn't know if there was a fire or what," he says. "It looked like no one lived there." It is hard, at least for strangers, to get Eminem to do something with his face other than stare impassively, but when I describe my visit, his eyes widen. "It's still there?" he asks.

"It may sound corny, but I'll go by and try to remember how things were when I was in those houses," he continues. "I'll go back and remember, like, fuck, man, how life was back then. How much of a struggle it was. As time goes by, you might get content and forget things."

In his stiff, alert bearing, there's no hint of the manic playfulness you get in his music or his videos. This is especially striking because the studio, which he owns and refers to as "my house," is a pleasure dome: A dozen vintage arcade games line one wall of the main lounge, facing a soda fountain. A pile of unopened shoeboxes—freebies sent by Nike—sits next to a window facing an interior garden equipped with a barbecue grill.

Many successful people—not to mention virtually every rapper in history—say they thrive on struggle, even as they're surrounded by opulence. But Eminem, the biggest recording artist of the 2000s, to the tune of 80 million albums sold, has a relationship to adversity that is unique and extreme. He made his name, foremost, as a fighter, as a threat, as an irritant—battling for acceptance as a white MC, railing against censorious parents' groups and pundits, lashing out viciously against everyone from his mother to George W. Bush to 'N Sync.


A few years ago, he says, when he felt he'd run out of opponents to challenge, out of hypocrisies to expose, and out of constraints to bridle

under, his antagonizing energies turned themselves inward, nastily, with the help of a prescription-drug addiction that made him all but unrecognizable to himself. "I was trapped in my head. I'd spent most of my career going against the grain. Calling bullshit. And suddenly, I started running out of enemies," he says. "I started to become that cliché: my own worst enemy."

Recovery is about that period in his life. Unfiltered and unrelenting, it's the most emotionally grueling album Eminem has released, detailing his addiction, anxieties, and nightmares with barely any recourse to the schizoid character-juggling, gross-out humor, or splatter-film gore that have been his trademarks until now. Like the car trips he likes to take through his old neighborhoods, reminding himself how bad things were, *Recovery* is an often harrowing trip down one blighted memory lane—the kind of street you don't feel quite safe on, even at 11 A.M.

**E**MINEM'S ACTUAL HOUSE, which he bought seven years ago, sits near the end of an unpaved road in Rochester, Michigan. Driving there, you pass over a creek, and the sides of the street are densely wooded. His neighbors' houses, like his, are gargantuan and set far back. It's not uncommon for deer to trot across front lawns.

According to public records, the house is 15,000 square feet, with six bedrooms and nine and a half bathrooms. Satellite pictures online reveal a sprawling behemoth ringed by a pool, a pond, and a basketball court. You get a better view from those images than you do from the road, where trees, an imposing stone wall, and a heavy gate obscure all but slivers of the house. One sign warns off trespassers and another announces that attack dogs patrol the premises.



**"COMING UP IN  
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IS DEAD."**

Not too long ago, this house became Eminem's gilded cage. He exiled himself here during the depths of his drug problem, which he attributes to an addictive personality he inherited from his mother, and to the fatal 2006 shooting of his childhood friend, the rapper Proof. The time between 2005 and the spring of 2008, when Eminem says he finally got sober, wasn't pretty.

At his worst, he'd swallow "between ten to 20" Vicodins a day and more Ambiens and Valiums than he can recall. In 2005, he canceled a European tour and checked himself into rehab. In December 2007, two years after that first rehab stint, he overdosed on methadone capsules in his bathroom, the equivalent, he's said, of "shooting up four bags of heroin." At home, he watched a small selection of DVDs obsessively. He'd descend into his basement theater and put them on repeat: *The Rocky* films, *Shooter*, *Boogie Nights*—he figures he's watched them all 150 times. ("I'm a fan of Mark Wahlberg," he attests.) This ritual, he says, was about control: "The feeling I was getting was I want something that's familiar, where I know what's going to happen next."

And he ate a ton of garbage. "I would go downstairs and eat a bunch of fucking nachos or popcorn, just sitting around getting fat," Eminem says. "I just gave up." In January 2008, the *National Enquirer* ran a story titled **EMINEM STARTING TO LOOK LIKE AN M&M**. The article put his weight at "over 200 pounds" and made unsympathetic reference to Outback Steakhouse binges and "droopy man-breasts."

His fourth major-label album, 2004's *Encore*, was recorded at the very beginning of his downsiding. It includes songs he can now appreciate in theory, he says, but he doesn't enjoy listening to any of them. "It reminds me of the phase when I was starting to get really high in the studio," he says. "A lot of dumb shit was funny to me."

*Encore* has tedious stretches, but it also stands as a stunning portrait of a meltdown—especially at some of its dumbest moments. Throughout, Eminem hopscoches between different accents and personas, repeating, interrupting, and contradicting himself. At its best, the album is a virtuoso exploration of identity slippage—of just how exhilarating (and frightening) it can be to actually lose yourself in the music.

The music Eminem made next, he says, had no such redeeming qualities—he promises that nobody will ever hear it. "I had this slurry tone," he says. "There were songs where it sounded like I was talking-rapping. I'd become so fucking lazy. Songs where I would talk about eating so much and getting fat and saying, 'Fuck it, I don't care.'"

He went to "three or four" NA and AA meetings in Detroit, but they left him unsatisfied. "I'd walk in and it was like, 'Holy shit, Bugs Bunny!' When Bugs Bunny walks in the room, people are going to look," he recalls. "It's just hard, being who I am, to walk into those situations." Today, he sees a rehab therapist once a week, and he says, "there's a few people I talk to" privately.

One of them is a high-profile (unofficial) spon-



sor. "Elton John calls me once a week," Eminem says. "He used to tell me stuff like, 'You're going to start seeing certain things you've been overlooking.' And it came true. I'd walk around like, 'Damn, that tree does look crazy, look at all those leaves!' Things I didn't notice when I was fucked up."

At one point, in the summer of 2006, he says he grew deeply jealous of Lil Wayne, whom he describes today as "a genius." "I would hear lines of his, the way he'd connect his words, and I thought, 'Man, I can do that shit. He ain't that

dope.' I'm hearing this dude say some clever, witty shit and I'm not doing it, so I feel fucked up." He decided to release a song attacking the New Orleans rapper, along with Kanye West, whose success Eminem also admired.

But he thought better of it, a decision he recalls on the new song "Talkin' 2 Myself." "If I had done something like that? Where they were at and where I was at?" he says, shaking his head. "It would have been career suicide. They would have fuckin' murdered me."



**E**MINEM WILL TALK about the overdose. He will talk about the creative lows. He might even talk about the droopy man-breasts if you ask him nicely enough. But his publicist informs me before the interview that he will not talk about Haillie Jade, his 14-year-old daughter and the subject of several of his songs. He will not talk about whether she has read all the *Twilight* books or which Justin Bieber song she adores or what it's like for him as a dad now that she is of dating age.

But during our talk, he mentions playing "catch, volleyball, and a lot of tag" around the house with his kids—Haillie, his teenage niece, and his two-time ex-wife Kim's seven-year-old daughter all live with him part-time—so I try to get further into the subject.

*Now that Haillie is 14, does she still enjoy hanging out with her dad, or is she declaring independence?*

"There's some aspect of that. Like, 'C'mon, Dad, get outta here!'" He pauses, looking down at his hands. "It's a catch-22: I want to, as a father, express my love for my girls, but I don't want to go too far with it, where it becomes a hindrance in their lives. When they were younger, it didn't matter, it was easier."

*Did you ever have a conversation with Haillie where you explained the thinking behind certain songs—why you'd said the things you'd said about her mom, for instance?*

"Honestly, no disrespect, man, I have to get off this subject. The less that's out there about the kids, the more chance of them having a normal life. I want the world to know how much I love them, but at the same time you gotta know when to pull back."

If there's an overarching theme to our conversation, it's that Eminem is trying to learn when, and how, to pull back. This is largely an issue of growing older. The same way that Jay-Z—who will co-headline stadium shows with Eminem this fall in their respective hometowns of New York City and Detroit—has spent his past three albums figuring out how to deal with aging in a genre so focused on youth, Eminem is wondering how visible (or potentially embarrassing) the notion of a middle-age Slim Shady is. "The big 4-0 is staring me in the face," he says. "You can't walk around pretending it's not."

For Eminem, maturity means a few things. Mostly, it means he's trying to edge away from his role as a professional shock merchant. This was the trap he says he fell into on *Relapse*, his 2009 "comeback" album, which has sold nearly two million copies (and which has been in *Billboard*'s Top 100 for 154 consecutive weeks as of this writing) but nonetheless struck many critics, Eminem included, as uninspired. The jokes about Hannah Montana seemed rote, the digs at Mariah Carey seemed stale, and the rhymes about killing sprees seemed, well, bloodless.

"It was a regression, me rhyming to shock peo-

ple again," he says. "How much fucked-up shit can I say? Coming up in hip-hop, you wanna say things that get a reaction. But after a while, people get used to it, and it's like the joke is dead."

He's one of the most iconic pop stars in history, and yet his influence is tricky to identify. What white rappers since have come close to his success? Paul Wall? Asher Roth? Fergie? You can hear something of Eminem in Lil Wayne's madly careening, how-does-he-think-of-this-stuff? verses, or in the self-examining rhymes of Kanye or Drake, but obliquely at best. Maybe Eminem's achievement was more symbolic: He embodied the fascinating moment when hip-hop penetrated the American suburbs so fully that its most recognizable—and most threatening—face had blond hair and blue eyes.

Eminem's plan was to cull a second album from the *Relapse* sessions last year—*Relapse 2*. But as he put more distance between himself and his addiction, those songs grew less appealing to him; ultimately, he decided to scrap them, recording the entirety of *Recovery* in about nine months. Dr. Dre helped out as always, but Eminem also brought in new blood: Just Blaze, best known for his work with Jay-Z, and Boi-1da, who produced Drake's "Forever." "I started choosing words carefully as far as striking an emotional chord," Eminem explains. "I had to relearn to put the emotion back in my shit." The mood was infectious: Lil Wayne shows up to fume on "No Love," and Pink sings the scaldingly defiant chorus on "Not Back Down."

"I think he's one of the most poetic, bally, and hilarious people this industry has ever



Performing at the *Relapse* release party, May 2009

seen," says Pink. "I was always afraid he'd pick me as a target, but he's always been nice to me and finally approached me to be on the album, so I must have done something right."

You can hear "mature" Eminem in the chorus of lead single "Not Afraid": "I'm not afraid to take a stand," he sings. "Everybody come take my hand." For a guy who has rapped about eating placentas and molesting unconscious minors, the refrain is surprisingly...wholesome. If 27-year-old Slim Shady heard the song, Eminem admits, "He'd be like, 'What the fuck? You got soft.'" But he adds, "If I can make songs to inspire people and try and help them, fuck, why not?"

At one point in our conversation, the subject of Kanye West's Taylor Swift broadside comes up. Weighing in, Eminem sounds more like a protective father than the provocateur who might once have written a song defiling Swift: "He shouldn't have done that. I mean, she's a little girl."

## 12-Step Shuffle

Five other post-rehab albums that mix catharsis with cringiness

BY STEVE KANDELL



**Lou Reed**  
*THE BLUE MASK*  
(1982)

Now sober and married (to a woman!), rock's original deviant declared himself an "average guy," balancing domesticity and dope sickness.

**Moment of clarity:** "I curse my tremors, I jump at my own step / I cringe at my terror, I have my own smell / I know where I must be, I must be in hell" ("Waves of Fear")



**David Crosby**  
*OH YES I CAN*  
(1989)

Three years after getting clean the hard way—serving a year in jail for drug and gun possession—the Pete Doherty of his generation released this superglossy slab of SoCal blues-pop.

**Moment of clarity:** "I've been fightin', fightin', fightin' just to stay alive" ("Monkey and the Underdog")



**Steve Earle**  
*I FEEL ALRIGHT*  
(1996)

Like Crosby, Earle kicked heroin in jail, not some treatment center. The acoustic *Train a Comin'* was his first album in five years, followed quickly by this rurel country-rock classic that didn't always live up to its sunny title.

**Moment of clarity:** "Heroin is the only thing / The only gift the darkness brings" ("CCKMP")



**Metallica**  
*ST. ANGER*  
(2003)

As immortalized in *Some Kind of Monster*, the recording of Metallica's eighth album was interrupted by James Hetfield's rehab stint. When he emerged, the raw feelings were channeled into the lyrics, with help from the band's on-call therapist.

**Moment of clarity:** "My lifestyle determines my deathstyle" ("Frantic")



**Wilco**  
*SKY BLUE SKY*  
(2007)

If 2004's *A Ghost Is Born* felt jittery, blame the pill addiction Jeff Tweedy was treated for after its release. This is the sound of cobwebs being cleared.

**Moment of clarity:** "If you're strung out like a kite / Or strung awake in the night / It's all right to be frightened / When there's a light" ("What Light")

But he also confesses that he didn't pay much attention. In fact, what's consistent between *Relapse* and *Recovery* is that, on both albums, Eminem seems to have fallen out of touch with pop culture in a way that stands in stark contrast to the music of his youth: Years before TMZ, after all, Eminem was a ruthless, one-man celebrity tarnishing machine. The references on *Recovery* are somewhat less dated than those on *Relapse*—Brooke Hogan, David Cook, and Ben Roethlisberger are among the targets. Michael J. Fox, an Eminem perennial, makes two appearances.

This is not simply an artistic choice. While we're talking, it's revealed that Eminem knows absolutely nothing about the Conan O'Brien/Jay Leno *Tonight Show* dustup. (When I fill him in, he succinctly summarizes the debacle: "So, Conan got fucked on that.") Part of the reason he's out of the loop, he says, is that when he turns on his TV these days, it's only to watch football, basketball, *Celebrity Rehab*, and Discovery Channel shows "about space and dinosaur shit."

He says he doesn't know how to turn on a computer. He'll watch YouTube videos that friends show him—he enjoyed the clip for onetime nemesis Insane Clown Posse's "Miracles" but was unsure "if they were playing or being serious"—but that's about it. Assistants help keep him up on new music. (One tells me that Eminem particularly liked the drums on the Sleight Bells album.) He has a Twitter account but explains, "When I

wanna Twitter, I have to tell someone to do it.

"Here's why I don't know how to work a computer," he continues, sipping a soda and munching almonds. "If I learn how, I'm going to be on that bitch all day looking at comments about me, and it's going to drive me crazy." It's startling to hear: How could a musician who has occupied so contentious a spot in the public eye for so long be that vulnerable? His manager, Paul Rosenberg, describes it as a trait bordering on the masochistic: "He doesn't read blogs or anything, but when he hears stuff, he can't help but let it in."

It's getting late and Eminem is growing restless, but before we wrap up, I ask him if he'll show me one of his notebooks. When it comes to his craft,

Eminem forswears technology in another important way: Rappers like Drake and Lil Wayne fill Blackberries with ideas for rhymes, but Eminem still puts pen to paper. From the clutter on a nearby desk he produces a Dallas Cowboys composition book (he's been a Cowboys fan since childhood), holds it up so that it faces me, and starts flipping.

Every inch of every page is covered, diagonally, in clumps of his handwriting—stanzas, couplets, similes. More than anything else, this, he says, is proof of how much better he's doing. "There was a four-year period where I had writer's block," he says. "I had to learn how to write again. But when I started to get it back, I went crazy with the pen." The pages stop moving momentarily, arrested by a piece of paper wedged into the notebook—it is light blue, and before Eminem leafs past it, I make out a crude drawing of an animal and the words I LOVE YOU DADDY beneath it.

He closes the book and rises for a handshake, figuring that that's as nice a note to end on as any. *Recovery* was due at his label, Interscope, days ago, and there is still mastering to be done. You get the feeling that even if there weren't, though, he'd find something else to tinker with, some other reason to hunch over the mixing board or step into the booth—not just because of perfectionism, but because he's thrilled to be in the zone again and doesn't want it to stop.

"Back to work," he says, as he disappears into his "house." ☎


**"IF I LEARN HOW  
TO WORK A  
COMPUTER, I'M  
GOING TO BE ON  
THAT BITCH ALL  
DAY LOOKING AT  
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GOING TO DRIVE  
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DECONSTRUCTING

# M ★ I ★ A ★

**Confused revolutionary? Brilliant provocateur? Maya Arulpragasam is the most polarizing figure in pop today, a neon blur of contradictions and confluences—but she may also be the most thrilling. Here's a handy primer to her life and art and everything in between.**

By JON DOLAN

By some accounts—including her own—we should all be done talking about Maya Arulpragasam. In 2007, promoting her sophomore album, *Kala*, the singer known as M.I.A. told an interviewer, “I feel like a mirror reflecting back everyone’s perception of me. Part of me wants to carry on. Part of me wants to stop.” Eight months later, onstage at Bonnaroo, she went even further: “This is my last show,” she announced.

Like many things she says, the statement posed more questions than it answered. And soon enough, M.I.A.’s career was on another upswing: In the summer

of 2008, the trailer for *Pineapple Express* turned *Kala*’s best song, “Paper Planes,” into a hit; she performed at the Grammys (on the day she was scheduled to give birth); got an Oscar nomination for Best Song for the *Slumdog Millionaire* track “O...Saya”; and saw *Kala* go gold.

Now, she’s just released her third and most anticipated album, *MMXXI*, and the mirror is only getting bigger and bigger, shifting fun-house-style. The ultraviolent video for “Born Free” caused a media shit storm. The *New York Times Magazine* chimed in with a nine-page feature that attempted

to expose M.I.A. as an entitled, politically naive hypocrite (if you missed the ensuing Internet-fueled micro-scandal, you really need to spend less time outside).

Of M.I.A.’s many talents, explaining herself may not be her strongest or her favorite—she declined to go on the record for this story—but that’s okay. We’re happy to give it a shot. In that same 2007 interview, she predicted, “I might be in carpentry next year.” Or maybe not.





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HER

## MUSIC



M.I.A. HAS CLAIMED that when she moved from war-torn Sri Lanka to London in 1983 at age eight, she only knew two English words: "Michael Jackson," as if her beats-without-borders worldview came via some sort of *Thriller*-inscribed primal scene. When "Galang" hit in 2004, it worked a space between hip-hop, dancehall, and then-trendy grime, **like the Sitts meets rave meets Missy Elliott**. Never much of a singer or dancer, she worked in the tradition of technically limited geniuses like Madonna and Miles Davis, who only used exactly the amount of talent necessary to make a scene.

"She's got a million ideas," says Rusko, one of the producers on her new album. "When we record her, we fix some of the out-of-tune notes and keep some in. A lot of recording with her is happy accidents."

M.I.A. got her start as a London graphic designer and scenester, hanging with English pop heavies like Elastica's Justine Frischmann and Blur's Damon Albarn. In 2000, while working as Elastica's tour videographer, she learned how to operate a Roland MC-505 drum machine with help from the tour's





opening act, smut-rapper Peaches. A large coterie of producers and engineers worked on her 2005 debut, *Arular*, but it still had the euphoric feel of a novice punching buttons and letting her chanting-rapping-trilling-spelling vocalese bounce off the sounds she conjured.

"Today, hip-hop is club music," says Rusko, who notes that having M.I.A. on his résumé led to work on new Britney Spears tracks. "Hip-hop and R&B are looking towards club music for ideas right now. She and [ex-boyfriend and frequent collaborator] Diplo were some of the first people to do that. It's the rule now."

2007's *Kala* was supposed to be the record where she went pro. Timbaland was on tap to coproduce (he ended up doing one track). But when the U.S. government denied her a long-term work visa, she regrouped and recorded throughout the third world, culminating performances from Nigerian MC Afrika Boy and a 30-piece Indian drum circle, among others. On *Kala*, the sounds of third-world slums hammer at the gates of first-world pop; **"I put people on the map that never seen a map,"** she sang on "20 Dollar."

In a sense, **"/\ /\ \ /\** is a map, a global picture of the matrices of technology, power, and money. The technology theme gestated during her pregnancy, where the housebound mom-to-be became obsessed with new media. (Google is thanked in the liner notes.) "XXXX" turns on a metaphor about flattened identities in the iPhone era; "Internet Connection" is a meditation on aloneness inspired in part by a three-hour bout with customer service; "Lovealot" is the story of Russian Islamic teen terrorists who met online; and the album-closing "Space Odyssey" turns the floaty phrase "My lines are down, you can't call me" into a double metaphor for romantic disconnection and techno-alienation.

The music is as universal as the theme, less worldly in that it doesn't use global beats but more of the world in that it plays off the pop music that most people actually listen to. It's folk music for the iPad age, her most radical gesture yet.



# BUSINESS

M.I.A.'S ONLY HIT began to bubble up just as the global economy started to tank. "Paper Planes" was built around a sample of the Clash's "Straight to Hell" and its refrain ("All I want to do is [boom boom boom] and take your money") circled a nexus of capitalism and nihilism, the rallying cry for the AIG gangstas torching our 401(k)s.

Like everything about her, M.I.A.'s own connections to capitalism are complex. This year, she turned down licensing offers from Coke and Pepsi, and recently said, "Money is the enemy of music." Yet, in 2008, she told this magazine she was "polluting the mainstream" by licensing "Gang" to Honda. It's a measure of M.I.A.'s heart-tugging power over leftist music fans that this engendered debates about the nature of selling out and quaintly harked back to the early days of punk. Reflecting a less tortured impulse, her own actions, and those of her fiancé, Benjamin Bronfman, suggest a positive relationship between wealth and power; Bronfman used seed money from his father, Warner Media Group CEO Edgar Bronfman Jr., to cofound Global Thermostat, a sustainable-development firm. M.I.A. gives extensively, though quietly, to a number of charities.

HER

# POLITICS

SECTION II



M.I.A.'s stencil artwork

IN 2004, M.I.A. and Diplo released their first mixtape, titled *Piracy Funds Terrorism*, comparing downloaders to suicide bombers. It established her unique political posture, charging herself with being the chief Western voice of Sri Lanka's Tamil minority, an ethnic group that has been subject to systemic oppression at the hands of the country's Sinhalese majority. This has forced her into a problematic rhetorical relationship with the militant separatist Tamil Tigers, whose most extreme tactics include the use of child soldiers and many suicide bombings (which they are credited with popularizing). M.I.A.'s father founded a nonviolent forerunner of the Tigers, called EROS, and while many early stories on her fabricated a Tiger connection, she strenuously claims he was never in the group. In 2008, she said, "I don't support terrorism and never have," and she doesn't support the Tigers. Other statements ("Give war a chance"), suggest a radical-chic identification with violent rhetoric that recalls

'60s groups the Weather Underground and Red Brigades. Detractors point to her use of tiger in her videos and on her website; in 2008, a Sri Lankan-American rapper named DeLeon posted a parody video of "Paper Planes," featuring images of Tiger atrocities.

She has been articulate in explaining the ways reactionary leaders brand all dissent as "terror." "When [Westerners] think Tamil, you automatically think Tiger," she said in 2009. "If you're a terrorist organization, you don't have the right to speak. That's been passed on to the Tamil civilians." At the same time, she can play fast and loose with facts. She claims, for instance, that the Sri Lankan military is "a million soldiers big"—it's closer to 340,000. She has also been criticized for calling the civil war in her native country a "genocide," though it hasn't been officially designated as such.

"Any time you're trying to address a complicated situation or complex ideas, you're going to have a hard time getting it across," says

Boots Riley of leftist Bay Area rappers the Coup (and rap rockers Street Sweeper Social Club), who caused a media maelstrom by depicting the World Trade Center exploding on the cover of a record that was supposed to come out right after 9/11. "When it's CNN interviewing you and you've only got five seconds, you've got to cut to the core." In 2009, shortly after her genocide claim, hostilities in Sri Lanka came to an end. Yet at least 80,000 Tamils still live in army-run camps.

M.I.A. throws herself into this mess headlong, embodying the impulse to incite and also to heal. If her comments often seem contradictory, that too is a kind of message. "If I represent anything, it's what it's like to be a civilian caught up in a war," she said in 2005. In other words, **she represents not just struggle, but dissonance, a kind of permanent refugee status.** Maybe that's why her political statements can at times end up sounding like this recent tweet: "I got digital cash Hactivism at its best: Google Bombing with my Infomaintain."

She claims that if she does license her music, it will only be to help her protégés. M.I.A. has signed several young artists to her boutique label, N.E.E.T. (based on the acronym for "Not in Employment, Education, or Training"), bankrolled by Interscope. "Record companies don't have the money to pay A&R people anymore," says Diplo. **"They give these labels to everyone. A lot of people don't do anything with them. She has to."** M.I.A.'s big score is punky, crunk Brooklyn duo Sleight Bells, this year's buzziest New York band. She's

also played Henry Higgins to 19-year-old Baltimore rapper Rye Rye and oddball producer Blaststar, who lent his dark, grimy beats to **"/\ /\ \**. She sees N.E.E.T. more as a media company than record label (one signee is a photographer, Jaime Martinez). And while her role varies—she was very involved in Rye Rye's forthcoming debut but less so with the Sleight Bells album—it all enhances the sense of M.I.A. as an arbiter of boundary-busting possibility.

"I'm all about hip-hop and R&B," says Rye Rye. "She introduced me to other genres, tribal stuff. People thought a couple songs sounded more like hers than mine. We compromised."



Blaststar and Diplo, 2009



HER

SECTION  
IV

## AESTHETIC

"WHEN I MET her, she was silk-screening her own covers for the 12-inch for 'Fire Fire,'" Diplo recalls of the pre-*Arular* M.I.A. "I was amazed. It was hand-painted, with these Molotov cocktails and her tiger prints and stuff. She always knew this was the angle." Before the candy-colored images of guns, war planes, bombs, and tanks that decorate the *Arular* CD booklet caused controversy, they won her acclaim as a visual artist. In 2002, she was nominated for a prestigious Alternative Turner Prize, and early profiles of M.I.A. often noted that Jude Law was among the early collectors of her work.

The mix of hyper-bright and vaguely insurgent is a thread she's followed in making the now-standard pop-star move into fashion design. M.I.A.'s own look can run from futurist-aerobics instructor to new-wave pirate to dancer in an old X-Clan video to queently candy raver. Early '90s

photos of African slum kids carrying AK-47s and wearing Michael Jordan jerseys donated by American charities goes a long way toward explaining this.

The clothes she sells are pastiches, radiantly bright and button-pushing, not exactly the kind of thing you can expect to see trickling down to Filene's Basement. From a bomber jacket (\$210) resembling a hodgepodge of African flags (like the cover of Bob Marley's *Survival*) to a sleek hoodie festooned with watermelon slices, her music's themes of commodification, appropriation, and noticeability-at-all-costs (including a \$65 tank top) are all there.

"She samples styles and mixes colors and prints the same way she constructs music," says designer Carrie Munden, who has worked

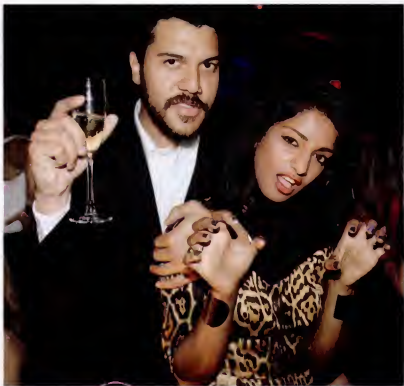


The *Arular* cover (top): Rye Rye in M.I.A.-designed garb, 2009

with M.I.A. since the "Galang" video. "It's chaos. But the end result is unique, and she is one of the only female artists on her level to be completely in control of her own style."

Indeed, in an era in which music occupies an increasingly thin, crowded cultural bandwidth, being a "multi-platform" operation is essential. "Even when we were working on tracks, she'd be putting pictures together and getting images off Google," says Rusko. "She was always thinking about the whole package."

M.I.A. smartly gives this strategy its own global-revolutionist spin. "The *Kala* artwork and sound and clothes are all about being worldly and representing the idea of the whole world being mashed up into one," she said in 2008.



CHIEFS Bronfman and fiancée, June 2010

HER

SECTION  
V

## LIFE

IRONICALLY,  $\wedge/\wedge/\wedge$  is actually less steeped in the iconography of terror and revolution than her previous work; there is a song called "Tequilla" but nary a Molotov cocktail gets flung. It's easy to credit this shift to a savvy assessment of her fans' rosier Obama-era worldview. Those close to her credit the shift to something more basic that isn't easy to discern from outside. **Confrontational videos and guerilla media tactics aside, her life is more normal than ever.**

"She's content now," says Rusko, who lived in the L.A. home she shares with Bronfman and traveled with her to Hawaii while recording  $\wedge/\wedge/\wedge$ . "Her life is a lot more settled now. She's got the baby. When we were recording, she'd do vocals, then go upstairs to be with

the baby for a couple hours. There wasn't much drama."

It shouldn't be shocking that the less hard-knock her life has gotten the more hits she's taken and the more paranoid of the press she's become. When M.I.A. first arrived in 2005, the gorgeous, impossibly cool singer with the exotic background and "freedom fighter" father made for ideal copy. Five years later, the image has flipped. In the lengthy *Times Magazine* profile, writer Lynn Hirschberg mustered a wide range of evidence (the food she eats, the house she lives in, the way in which she gave birth) to imply a disconnect between M.I.A.'s radical political rhetoric and her comfortable lifestyle. M.I.A., who sings, "I fight the ones that fight me" on "Loveall," walked the walk by tweeting Hirschberg's phone number and posting an incendiary dis track on the N.E.E.T. site.

"That writer was setting her up," says Boots Riley. "An artist has access to

media now that allows you to hold a writer accountable. Her move was brilliant."

The track is at once confrontational and wounded. Titled simply "I'm a Singer," it gives off a sense of awe at the values of a world that cares about the words of a pop star and ignores the real suffering of real people. ("Babies lying in the ditch / Thinkin' if they had a Kyte phone, you'll see this shit").

The old mirror paradox is back in play—scale, proportion, focus, all out of whack. "All I ever wanted was my story to be told," she sings on  $\wedge/\wedge/\wedge$ . For someone so skilled at image manipulation, that's hardly the whole picture. But if tomorrow night, the CIA black helicopters of her wildest fantasies really do swoop in and remove her to some undisclosed location for waterboarding and Justin Bieber-enhanced interrogation, and "I'm a Singer" was her final statement to the outside, its message would be clear enough: In the end, it's really all just art. ♦



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**SIMPLY PERFECT.**



Nathan Williams, shot  
for SPIN in Brooklyn,  
New York, June 2, 2010

*WAVVES' self-immolating wunderkind and indie-rock scourge Nathan Williams may be better known for one onstage disaster than for his hazy surf punk. This is about to change—if he can just stay out of his own way.*

# FIRE FIRE STARTER

By **MELISSA MAERZ**

Photographs by  
**ROBERTA RIDOLFI**

LOOKING AT NATHAN WILLIAMS, it's easy to think, *Here comes trouble*. Maybe it's just the way he's dressed: white Wayfarer-style shades with a Mickey Mouse decal over each lens—a gift from his girlfriend, Bethany Cosentino of Best Coast—and a T-shirt of Bart Simpson smoking a fatty. And he's drinking a beer on a Brooklyn street on a Tuesday afternoon, open-container laws be damned. Or maybe his reputation just precedes him.

"I know you want to talk about the meltdown," says Williams, a.k.a. Wavves. He takes a final swig, stashing the bottle behind a doorstep. "You'd think I melted into a puddle and they squeegeed me up and wrung me out offstage." He's referring to Wavves' performance at 2009's Primavera Sound Festival in Barcelona, which got the phrases "public breakdown" and "cocktail of Ecstasy and Valium" added to his Wikipedia entry. Even people who've never heard Wavves' music know Williams as That Guy Who Went Nuts Onstage, and the backlash has been vicious, even by catty comment-board standards. (At South by Southwest last March, Psychedelic Horseshit's singer wore a homemade WAVVES SUXX T-shirt.)

Williams may be the poster child for the chew-'em-up/spit-'em-out blog-era spin cycle. But with his explosive new album, *King of the Beach*, Williams has crafted the perfect comeback: Filled with fear and self-loathing and alienation and paranoia and monster riffs and sunny choruses, it's like acid-fried Brian Wilson and Bleach-era Kurt Cobain all rolled up into the skull of one troubled 24-year-old. "My own friends hate my guts," Williams sings on "Green Eyes." "Ah, so what? / Who gives a fuck?" Two years ago, Williams was just some kid living with his parents in San Diego. How did he become the most reviled man in indie rock?

Dirty shoes now propped up on a white sofa in a Greenpoint, Brooklyn apartment, Williams tucks his tousled hair inside a Dodgers cap. Self-administered tattoos of aliens and abstract symbols dot his arms. He could be any bored skater plucked from a 7-Eleven parking lot.

On his scrappy Fat Possum debut, *Wavves* [sic] (which followed an

even scrappier self-titled cassette put out by Woodsist), the multi-instrumentalist sang about nothing so controversial as the beach and girls and skateboarding. Recorded by himself at home on GarageBand, songs like "Weed Demon," "So Bored," and "Surf Goth" were both funny ha-ha in their stoner titles, and funny weird in their seaskick guitars, woozy harmonies, and lo-fi production. But there was also a certain desperation. "A lot of disillusioned teenage life is about having no hope, and that was the idea of Wavves at the beginning," says Williams, whose recording career began after he quit his job at a record store and moved back home, where he spent his days playing video games, watching *Seinfeld*, blogging about hip-hop, and fending off depression.

Anyone dealing with postcollegiate stress disorder could immediately identify, and by spring 2009, after the economy had collapsed and many unemployed grads moved back in with their parents, the album had become a cult hit. Creation Records founder Alan McGee called Wavves "the Cali sun-drenched child of the Jesus and Mary Chain circa '83." Suddenly, Williams was flying between Europe and the U.S.—by the time he arrived in Barcelona in May, he claims that he and drummer Ryan Ulsh had played 70 shows on consecutive days. "It was over-

whelming," he admits, "I needed a break."

Instead, he tried to power through. "The stagehands were saying, 'What drug do you want?'" he recalls. "I didn't say no to anything: prescription pills, Ecstasy, weed, whatever was there. The Xanax wipes your brain clean, so I don't remember much." Among the things he can't recall: taunting the crowd, dodging bottles, getting beer poured over his head, and drumsticks thrown at him by a fed-up Ulsh. The festival drew an estimated 80,000, and it seemed at least that many had documented and disseminated the carnage.

Among his peers, Williams had committed the ultimate sin: not acting like a brat, but rather taking opportunity for granted. "There's so many people that would wanna be doing that," Jared Swilley, bass-



ist-singer for Atlanta garage-rockers Black Lips, said of Williams during a radio interview that June. "And then to just blow it...He shouldn't play music."

"Random bands wrote me after Primavera to say they wished I'd overdosed," he says, his gaze fixed on the floor. Did he fuck up on purpose as a way of slowing things down? "That's what my mom said," he says, admitting he spent that night doing coke with Jay Reatard. Eight months later, Reatard was dead of an overdose, and Reatard's former bassist and drummer, Stephen Pope and Billy Hayes, who'd met Williams at Primavera, joined Wavves.

"People ask why we went from being in one crazy fuck-up's band to another's," says Pope. "But Nathan is unfairly judged. Primavera wasn't that bad."

In September 2009, Williams was making more enemies, this time for fighting with Swilley at a bar in Brooklyn. Swilley says that after he called Williams a "faggot," Wavves' tour manager hit him in the face with a bottle while six others—Williams claims he wasn't one of them—kicked him until he blacked out. "I was with Black Lips in Atlanta, and Jared went on a 20-minute rant," says Hayes. "He was like, 'He's so young, he doesn't deserve it.' I said, 'You're three years older than him. You think you're W.C. Handy charging your way through the streets, getting beaten by cops for playing the blues?'"

The mention of Swilley's name makes Williams stiffen up. "I listen almost exclusively to rap, and rappers are like, 'Say whatever you want about me, I don't give a shit.' But if I say that, I'm an asshole," he vents.

Indie rock, he says, is all about humility. "But I really like my music. [Hip-hop's] you-can't-fucking-touch-me invincible attitude makes me think about why I doubt myself."

Producer Dennis Herring, who helped turn Modest Mouse into an unlikely platinum act, deserves credit for Williams' confidence boost. Recorded at Herring's Sweet Tea in Oxford, Mississippi, *King of the Beach* is a rallying cry for *enfant terribles* everywhere. But the move from pool house to proper studio got off to a bumpy start—Fat Possum wanted him to replace Pope and Hayes, but he refused. "Nathan was nervous at first," Herring says. "He had a record company watching him and me judging him. I said, 'You know, it's going to be really fun.' And from then on we were making a record."

"To take on the world would be something," Williams sings on one *Beach* track. That might sound like defensiveness, but it also sounds like ambition—if people have already dismissed Wavves as yesterday's scandal, *King of the Beach* will make them listen to the music. Wouldn't that make him happy? "I don't think I've ever been happy," he says. "It's cool to see someone who has it all and they're a fucking wreck, because that's how it is. Black Flag, Minor Threat—they should have been on top of the world but they hated everything. When you're younger, you're like, 'Maybe it's just me, I'm a psycho.' But then you just realize that everyone is fucked up—my mom, my dad, my best friend, the pope. You all have that doubt like, 'What am I here for?'"

So what is he here for? He thinks for a minute. "Some people still root for you," he says. "And that's rewarding as fuck." ●

**"It's cool to see someone who has it all and they're a f--king wreck. Because that's how it is."**

*Nathan Williams*







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POT HEADS Mark Mothersbaugh, Gerald Casale, Alan Myers, Bob Casale, Bob Mothersbaugh do business casual, 1980.



# The Secret History of

# DEVO

Masterminds Mark Mothersbaugh and Jerry Casale (with a little help from Josh Freese) trace the evolution of the de-evolutionists

BY CHRIS WILLMAN

## 2 NEVER TOO MUCH MONKEY BUSINESS

In the mid-'70s, Casale divided his time between the unknown Devo and the blues band 15-60-75, which was famous throughout northeast Ohio. CASALE: "Mark and I had started buying masks. One time I brought a full-head rubber ape mask with me to a 15-60-75 gig and slipped it on before we did that Bo Diddley song 'You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover.' The people that were dancing stopped cheering for the band, started pointing, and [frontman] Bob Kidney turned around and saw me in the mask. I got fired. That helped me get more serious about Devo."

## 3 A TWISTED PRAIRIE HOME COMPANION

CASALE: "Everybody had a whacked-out sound. There were no normal sounds on any of the instruments. They had all been tweaked. What you hear on the *Hardcore Devo* CD is how we would sit around in a living room in 1974 or '75. Mark would have a Minimoog on a table and an ARP Odyssey [synth]. I would have a Gibson bass and a tiny amp. Jim Mothersbaugh would have his electronic drums, and Bob Mothersbaugh would have a guitar coming through a little Champ [amp]. And we would write songs and play them..."

MOTHERSBAUGH: "You're making it sound like Lake Wobegon."

## 4 SURVIVING THE SCENE

MOTHERSBAUGH: "There were two places we could perform without fear of a fistfight or just being paid to quit. That was Pirate's Cove in Cleveland, where 35 hardcore people would show up, and the Crypt in Akron, where we always had 20 friends and four guys wanting to beat us up. When you're that ostracized and disenfranchised in your peer group and in your local culture, you turn unfriendly back. I know we didn't appear to be friendly, but it was self-defense. It was part of our manifesto to separate ourselves out; we were more like aliens making satirical comments on the culture. We took pleasure in being lightning rods for hostility and freaking people out."

## 5 VIDEO NOW FOR THE FUTURE

CASALE: "People forget, we did play rock'n'roll. The emphasis got put elsewhere in the public image and the press. But nobody who saw Devo live thought we couldn't rock." MOTHERSBAUGH: "But we didn't think we necessarily had to go out and perform. We were inspired by a *Popular Science* magazine with some clean-cut 1974 couple holding up a laserdisc. We were making music-driven narratives, short films, and we were going to do a collection of 'em once a year on laserdisc. And we also imagined playing one concert that would be beamed everywhere, so you don't go on tour to support the laserdisc."

## 1 FROM HIPPIE TO HIPSTER—THE JERRY CASALE WAY

At Kent State, the Devo cofounder was a member of Students for a Democratic Society and attended the tragic May 4, 1970 protest where unarmed students were fired upon by the National Guard. Two of the four slain were friends of his. CASALE: "That solidified brute power winning out over truth. They got away with murder. When you live through that and see the newspapers are a complete and utter lie, you realize that's the real world. I wouldn't have been into a Devo aesthetic if that hadn't happened to me." He then shed any trace of counterculture style he may have associated with peace and love. "I cut my hair, got rid of my flared pants and velvet shirts, and went to this pimp store in Cleveland, where I bought straight-legged pants, high, black shoes, and a long leather jacket, like you'd see the Black Panthers wearing."



Backstage in Hollywood, August 1977

## 6 "WE GOTTA GET OUTTA THIS PLACE"

**CASALE:** "In Akron, there were all these very anti-intellectual people; they were just stoned and drunk all the time. It was a depressed area, too, because that was the end of the industrial rubber-and-tire culture there, and nothing was replacing it." **MOTHERBAUGH:** "Yeah, we never had a summer of love in Akron—just a repetition of the summer of hate over and over again....When we showed up as strangers in New York in 1977, it was electrifying. When we came back, we were local heroes because we were insanely brave warriors who went to New York and lived to tell about it. I think the night a couple of the Dead Boys attacked us at the Crypt and the crowd was cheering for us was a good turning point in Akron. And then it was on to the yellow sludge of Southern California in the summer of 1977, which changed everything forever."

## 7 Q: ARE WE NOT IN THE MIX? A: WE ARE ENO

The recording of debut album *Q: Are We Not Men? A: We Are Devo* involved a passive-aggressive battle of wits with producer Brian Eno. **MOTHERBAUGH:** "When we were transferring the master to digital about ten years ago, we realized that he played all these synthesizer tracks that we never used in the mix. We would all politely listen to 'em, and then before we said, 'Let's do the take now,' one of us would go over and mute his synth. God, what if there was some way to entice him into taking the album now and doing what he would have done to it? He played parts on everything; they just didn't all show up. But that is him singing on the chorus of 'Uncontrollable Urge!—the Bavarian castrati voice.'"



## 8 "WHIP IT" WHIPS IT GOOD

With their third album, 1980's *Freedom of Choice* (whose cover introduced their trademark red "Energy Dome" flower-pot hats), the band became huge when a single meant to spoof *Dale Carnegie*-style positivity inspired an \$8M-ringed video. **MOTHERBAUGH:** "We'd talk about movies and all these things we wanted to do, and the record company people would start to trail off and change the subject, like they were thinking, 'Art band, art band.' Then, all of a sudden [Warner Bros.], who had ignored us for a couple albums—although we stayed in the black the whole time—looked at us, 'Do whatever you want to do, just do another "Whip It."'"

## 10 ON NO, IT'S ON NO, IT'S DEVO

For their fourth album, the band wanted to crack that whip on producer Roy Thomas Baker, then famous for his work with the Cars and Queen. **MOTHERBAUGH:** "He lasted about three weeks before he started showing up very late to the sessions and leaving very early. Producing a record was definitely a culinary experience for him." **CASALE:** "He brought one of those expensive wicker English picnic sets to the studio, with plates and silverware, and then he'd bring in a huge deep-dish pizza, and he'd pour a little wine and go, 'I think it's time for a little drinky-poo.' We watched him gain weight as the project went on." **MOTHERBAUGH:** "He would time it perfectly, and could finish one slice of his pie for each song." **CASALE:** "Baker mixed that stuff and it sounded awful."

## 11 INDEPENDENT'S DAYS

After splitting with Warner Bros. in 1985, the band landed at indie Enigma for two albums, 1988's *Total Devo* and 1990's *Smooth Noodle Maps*. **MOTHERBAUGH:** "We were told by people in the know that they were the next IRS Records, this great up-and-coming company. And the day after we signed the contract, we toured the place and realized we were on the *Titanic*. Everybody was disheartened. For the guys to say we would want to try it again, it really required the record companies to go through their meltdown."

## 13 CASALE LANOS A NEW DAY JOB

**CASALE:** "Directing commercials was so much easier than music videos, where the manager, agent, and girlfriend would all weigh in till there was nothing left of the original idea, and you would deal with the same five people saying, 'We need more of the lead singer.'" There was a separate—but more manageable—business in advertising. "You'd have to reheat it because the little girl didn't pick up the pencil right. Or, 'The way she looked at Mrs. Butterworth—it was descending.'"

## 14 THE SWIFFER HELPS DEVO CLEAN UP

**MOTHERBAUGH** considers the ubiquitous commercial for the household static broom, on which the band implores consumers to "Swiff it good!" the real-life version of what late director Bruce Conner was parodying with *Mongoloid*. Devo's seminal 1977 music video. The band members deny reports that they didn't care for the ad. **CASALE:** "Maybe what they meant to say was that we resented the fact that I didn't get to direct it. [Laughs] Back in 1980, I would have been trying to figure out how I was going to find an actress and talk her into doing that."





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Hard Rock,  
August 14

**ROB THOMAS**

Red Rock,  
August 14

**RUSH**

MGM Grand,  
August 14

**BOB DYLAN WITH  
JOHN MELLENCAMP**

Caesars Palace,  
August 18

**MICHAEL FRANTI  
AND SPEARHEAD**

Mandalay Bay,  
August 21

**BILLY IDOL**

Palms,  
August 21

**NORAH JONES AND  
CORINNE BAILEY  
RAE**

Palms,  
August 22

**DAVID GRAY**

Palms,  
September 3

**MELISSA ETHERIDGE**

Palms,  
September 4

**CHER**

Caesars Palace,  
September 5-11

**DAVID SPADE**

The Venetian,  
September 10-11

**RAY ROMANO  
AND KEVIN JAMES**

Mirage,  
September 10-11

**GARTH BROOKS**

Encore at Wynn  
Las Vegas,  
September 10-12

**CHERYL CROW**

Hard Rock,  
September 11

**BLACK LABEL  
SOCIETY AND  
2 CENTS**

Mandalay Bay,  
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Hard Rock,  
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## 15 NOT SO FAST, HAMBURG LARI!

It was a litigious, not laughing, matter when Devo reportedly settled out of court with McDonald's in 2008, after the fast-food giant distributed, as part of an American Idol promotion, a Happy Meal toy figure named New Wave Nigel—who just happened to be wearing a familiar red hat. **CASALE:** "That's where you've got to draw the line. We don't want to be associated with McDonald's—absolutely not." **MOTHERSBAUGH:** "I don't even agree with Jerry about that. That was just a trademarked icon, and you can't just take it." **CASALE:** "I am going further. I'm saying there are certain businesses that to me are just too evil."



## 16 WHAT'S IN A NAME? FUNNY YOU SHOULD ASK

In 2006, Casale released a little-heard Devo-esque album under the alias Jihad Jerry & the Evidores. **CASALE:** "I thought people would get the joke in seeing a mature man in a Sam the Sham & the Pharaohs turban and a bad suit. But Muslims and non-Muslims alike got offended in that climate where nothing is funny. Jihad Jerry didn't get the love. Maybe I could put on a Jar Jar Binks mask and rerelease it as Jer Jer Devo or something."



## 18 PEARL U WANT

Devo's yellow Hasmat-style uniforms have become so ubiquitous in popular culture that Eddie Vedder and Pearl Jam wore them during a 2009 Halloween concert in Philadelphia. **CASALE:** "They could have asked us how to wear them. He had it all wrong. He needed some fashion help. [Laughs] **MOTHERSBAUGH:** "That's why we had to move on."

## 19 NOT THROUGH BEING COOL

Besides the occasional live gig, since 2007 Devo have reunited for a handful of soundtracks and commercial songs—like "Watch Us Work It" for Dell. In recent years, reports that an album was in progress would inevitably be followed by rumors it had been scotched. It appeared as though Casale was more into a comeback album than Mothersbaugh, at least when he told a reporter a few years ago to ask Mark about why the on-again project was off again. Now the partners mutually blow off any suggestion that Mothersbaugh might have been too busy with his scoring work to care about Devo as much as the others. **FREEST:** "We started working on it without officially saying so. It was like the pink elephant in the room. No one wanted to say, 'We're making a record,' but we were making a record. And we did it without having a deal and with having the luxury of being able to work in Mark's studio. For better or worse, we had all the time in the world. And some times, when there's no deadline, that can be good and bad."



## 20 IN GOOD COMPANY

After examining various new models for releasing music in 2010, the band decided to go retro and re-sign with Warner Bros. **CASALE:** "To be honest, the highly touted alternatives to the record company model aren't in place. And in this dire economy, if there were a corporate partner or high-tech sponsor producing some gadget that would be amenable to Devo, they weren't dangling any bucks. Warners owned our back catalog, and stepped up and offered us marketing money when nobody else was offering us anything except 'Hey, we'll put you out.' It's a big deal, to renounce to the world that you're here after you've been debranded for 20 years. That's why marketing is everything."

**MOTHERSBAUGH:** "It's interesting because we're working with a dinosaur that wants to reinvent itself. That was worth the price of admission right there."

## 21 PEDAL TO THE META

For the new album, Something for Everyone, their first in 20 years, the band took a different direction when it came to songwriting. **CASALE:** "The songs are all about Devo and about the process of making music together. Some are more cloaked than others. Even 'Please Baby Please' is a song to the muse of creativity, saying, please give me just the energy to have a new idea. And 'Watch Us Work It' was about the band getting together and being able to do that." **MOTHERSBAUGH:** "Maybe that was our version of 'Heigh-Ho.'"

## 22 FREEDOM OF CHOICE 2010

Two versions of Something for Everyone have been released. One, the 'Song Study' edition, was determined by fans voting online on snippets from 16 songs—a survey put together by Mother, a marketing firm hired by the band. **CASALE:** "It's the 12 songs that were the most voted for in the order of their votes. You can see the bar graphs of how many votes for each song, and their faces are the elements in the bar graphs. So it's a bit of social networking, too." But the fan voting had no bearing on the standard edition. "There's also a 'corporate compromise' package. In the spirit of something for everybody, you can understand where corporate partners that invested their time and money wanted to have something to say about it. It's like representative democracy, the electoral college: Your vote counts—kind of."

Devo now



## 23 THE NEW UNIFORMITY

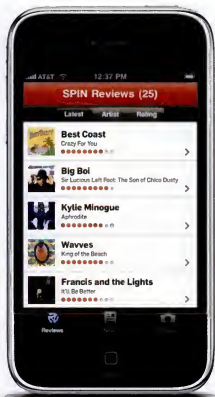
**CASALE:** "We worked with B. Akernud [wife of video director Jonas Akernud], a costume designer who works with Lady Gaga and the Black Eyed Peas. She found this fabric in Switzerland that's got titanium thread in it—super reflective, like the stuff they have on highway signs. So when we're hit with light onstage, we glow like holograms." Do the suits have more breathability than ever. But what we're providing now is over-the-counter relief. We're all going down together, and we're going to play those familiar tunes for you like the house band on the Titanic. **MOTHERSBAUGH:** "We're still pro-infatuation and anti-stupidity. I don't think talking about de-evolution was a negative thing, ever. Despite Jerry feeling like he's the bandleader on the Titanic, we were just pointing to the leaks in the ship and saying, 'Hey, water's coming in right there. We should do something about that.'"

## 24 THE FINAL WORD ON DE-EVOLUTIONARY THEORY

**CASALE:** "We don't piss anybody off with the de-evolution rap anymore. It's all real. Eight years of Bush, and people are dumber than ever. But what we're providing now is over-the-counter relief. We're all going down together, and we're going to play those familiar tunes for you like the house band on the Titanic. **MOTHERSBAUGH:** "We're still pro-infatuation and anti-stupidity. I don't think talking about de-evolution was a negative thing, ever. Despite Jerry feeling like he's the bandleader on the Titanic, we were just pointing to the leaks in the ship and saying, 'Hey, water's coming in right there. We should do something about that.'"



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## Beware the Sprawl

In a hopeless, heartless world, rock's righteous collective rides in to save our souls (again!)

By David Marchese

**O**N AN ALBUM full of moments when hope turns haunting, the ghosts hang heaviest on the spellbinding "Suburban War," which comes roughly halfway through Arcade Fire's blazingly intense third album. Against solemn ringing guitar, Win Butler sings about a man remembering an old friend. Once, the two grew their hair long and vowed to escape, past the fences and pavement, to a place where they could battle on behalf of what was pure. Years pass in a shiver of violin and piano, and now they find themselves fighting different wars. The old friend cuts his hair, then disappears. A martial beat pounds. Butler's voice trembles, the song steels itself in double-time, and the man peers into the window of every passing car, looking for his old friend's face, doomed to seek a lost connection. Two lives become shining beacons, distant stars.

If Arcade Fire's ragtag debut, *Funeral*, found its ecstatic force by celebrating the elusive comforts of community (hence four songs with the word

neighborhood in the title), and 2007's aggrieved, galvanizing *Neon Bible* powered forth in opposition to the hollow sparkle of church, state, and celebrity, then the harder, denser *The Suburbs* burns on behalf of the belief that modern culture is missing its heart—and to give up the search is to send one's soul to oblivion.

Or, in *Suburbs* speak, to the Sprawl, where everything is connected but nothing ever

touches. The deceptively easygoing title track opens things on a bouncy base of acoustic guitar and piano, as Butler, his resolute howl shaded with emotions absent from his younger self's wounded yelp, struggles against self-doubt ("Sometimes I can't believe it / I'm moving past the feeling") and the suspicious, show-me stance of the kids who wanna be so hard. Those kids return as cynical art schoolers in "Ready to Start," warning



[RATING]



Trash

Classic

Butler that businessmen will drink his blood, their own vampirism made seductive by a throbbing, death-wish bass line and rush of clanging guitar. Things downshift on the third track, "Modern Man," a gentle folk-rock ramble outfitted with glassy keyboard shudders that gradually evolve into majestic arabesques on the subsequent "Rococo," where modern kids build things up just to burn them down and the world crumbles in a craggy guitar solo.

This is a bigger, more byzantine Arcade Fire. Words that serve as master keys in one lyric become hushed whispers in another. Looped sounds of lonely traffic and needles stuck in endless grooves act as segues. "Jumping Jack Flash" echoes in the clarion-call guitars of "City With No Children" while the rapturous "Half Light II (No Celebration)" resounds with "Baba O'Riley" piano chords. Safety-pin punk and campfire folk share space on the punch-caress combo of "Month of May" and "Wasted Hours." Butler's consumptive croon in "Sprawl I (Flatland)" is rejuvenated by Régine Chassagne's seraphic wail on "Sprawl II (Mountains Beyond Mountains)." There are no wrong turns.

Radiant with apocalyptic tension and grasping to sustain real bonds, *The Suburbs* extends hungrily outward, recalling the dystopic miasma of William Gibson's sci-fi novels and Sonic Youth's guitar odysseys. Desperate to elude its own corrosive dread, it keeps moving, asking, looking, and making the promise that hope isn't just another spiritual cul-de-sac. After all, you never know who might be coming in the next car.



!!!  
Strange Weather, isn't it?  
\*\*\*\*\*

**WARP**  
Brooklyn punk funklin' gets somber makeover  
Bits of darkness invade III's first album in three years, and it's a dangerous supplement for a band whose foundation is winking, boisterous funk. When the slink doesn't get too murky, as on "AM/FM" and the cheery

"Steady as the Sidewalk Cracks," the nighttime vibe pays off. When the fun gets left behind ("Hollow," "Jump Back"), little remains except a pleasant-but purposeless bass groove. The sonic expansion is admirable, but perhaps a trip to Miami—instead of Berlin, where some of *Weather* was recorded—might've been a better atmospheric adjustment. **JOSH MODELL**

**ACTRESS**  
Splazh  
\*\*\*\*\*

**HONEST JON'S**  
House music maestro conducts bleak concerto  
Producer Darren Cunningham isn't a time traveler, but he plays one on his second album as *Actress*. All scuffed and scarred silicon, *Splazh* is like a cuneiform tablet from the future, which might explain why

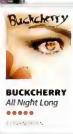
a collection of dystopian ambient house is being released on the ethnographically inclined Honest Jon's label. With beats sounding like they're muffled by cheesecloth and glassy synths muted like they're wrapped in cellophane, the *Actress* palette makes YouTube seem hi-fi. But beneath the stray bits and hiss, *Splazh*'s stoned dance grooves and stumbling, slo-mo electro—an odd mixture of Moodymann, Burial, and Boards of Canada—pull you into a world as immersive as the title promises.

**PHILIP SHERBURNE**

**Jay Bennett**  
Kicking at the Perfumed Air  
\*\*\*\*\*

**ROCK PROPER**  
Late Wilko collaborator raises his final glass  
Bennett was finishing up *Kicking at the Perfumed Air* when he died last year, and it comes with all the requisite intimations of mortality. The ex-Wilco member gets in touch with his inner Mark Eitzel, contrasting spare hooks and contrasts with operatic barfly pathos. And the finale will break your heart: "Beer," in which Bennett looks back

"You wish you were this finger!"



## Riff Raffish

Hollywood hooligans break into rock's liquor cabinet

**R**ESTRAINT WAS NEVER Buckcherry's strongest virtue—their most memorable lines remain "I love the cocaine" and "You're a crazy bitch but you fuck so good." The band's fifth album throws caution to the wind along with whatever self-consciousness was left lurking under frontman Josh Todd's CHAOS tattoo. From its sunrise-as-rebellion title down to its bombastic, comically cocky choruses ("It's a party! There's a party on the way!"), *All Night Long* posits Buckcherry as your ultimate all-night rager soundtrack; the fist-pumping anthem-makers who are best heard on 5 A.M. THOP runs.

Very little is off-limits: "Hair of the Dog"-style cowbell clonk, "We Will Rock You" rips with stadium-stomping verber, a lighter-waving power ballad called "I Want You" that sounds like Cinderella if they'd survived the grunge era. Rock songs about rocking, partying songs about partying; it's essentially Andrew W.K. for the Ed Hardy T-shirt set.

Buckcherry's purist obsession with AC/DC riffs and Steven Tyler lip-licks continues unabated ("Your kitty in the middle is callin'," etc.), but Todd does inject a more world-weary croon. He also has an honest-to-god "Man in the Mirror" moment on antipollution rant "Our World." Too bad such aspirations move them out of their nu-Crüe comfort zone and into the less timeless, post-Aquanet boogie of Great White and Extreme. **CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN**



with regret while downing 14 cold ones. "Think I'll crash my car / Then I'll become a star / Overright," he croons in an exhausted murmur, his voice catching on the last word. A perfect exit, stage left. **DAVID MENCONI**

## Big K.R.I.T.

K.R.I.T. Wuz Here

\*\*\*\*\*

SELF RELEASED

Upstart Southern playa tries to rewrite history This Mississippi MC/producer's bracing debut never lets you forget he hails from hip-hop's gulag (David Banner being the only escapee). And though he feels slighted—"Guess I didn't swag enough / Stupid fruity pebble chain Louis bag enough"—K.R.I.T.'s far from hidebound. Boasting an array of his own sophisticated beats, he'll "pop that pussy" over a bouncy drone ("Country Shit"), then go deep on causes and effects ("As Small as a Giant," "Children of the World," "They Got Us") with a nod to UGK and OutKast's contemplative hustle. "Hometown Hero," which riffs on Friday

Night Lights' Boobie Miles, is the sort of cinematic narrative most rappers never approach. **CHARLES AARON**

## Black Milk Album of the Year

\*\*\*\*\*

FAT BEATS

Dazzling Detroit producer speaks with his beats Black Milk has one of the liveliest production styles in hip-hop, mixing instrumental funk with loose, chopped beats reminiscent of J Dilla. On his fourth full-length, he keeps the focus rhythmic, layering percussive jams like "Distortion" and "Keep Going" with crashing cymbals and pounding bass drums. The crisp arrangements often overshadow his stiff, stentorian delivery, but he still manages to convey moments of both personal loss—the death of mentor/Slum Village rapper Baatin—and professional triumph. **MDSI REEVES**

## The Books

The Way Out

\*\*\*\*\*

TEMPORARY RESIDENCE

Playful sampling works devise arty electro-folk Five years since their last full-length and the Books' sparking, folksy collages haven't changed much: Nick Zammit and Paul de Jong still mine their acoustic instruments with laptops, still borrow vocals from thrift-store finds (here, self-help tapes), and still burst with nonthreatening wonder ("Beautiful People" is a light disco hymn about

irrational numbers). After three consistent, unique albums, the duo only flag when they abandon their sense of humor and mischief—which is what made them so smart in the first place. **MIKE POWELL**

## Bun B

Trill O.G.

\*\*\*\*\*

RAP-A-L-DIT/UNIVERSAL MOTOWN

Surrounded by admirers, a post-Pimp C life begins Bun B has had a career longer than many new jacks' lifetimes—UGK's *Too Hard to Swallow* dropped in antediluvian 1992—but he's been a model of consistency, no reinvention. Over brassy stabs, winding organs, and bass thumps that sound like upstairs neighbors dropping barrels, the Texas vet delivers his usual workmanlike couplets about hustling, wood-grain dash kits, and blasting foes "in the chest with the nina." What else is there? Partner Pimp C's death left Bun a soloist, but he's a natural co-conspirator: Collaborations with Drake, Young Jeezy, and T-Pain lack the BBD spare-rib smokiness of vintage UGK, but still satisfy. **BEN DETRICK**

## Crowded House

Intriguer

\*\*\*\*\*

FANTASY

New Zealand pop icon coizes up to the fourth Like Paul McCartney, Crowded House leader Neil Finn possesses a massive melodic gift, but no longer seems interested in writing anthems (à la "Don't Dream



A California girl in her seasonal habitat

# She So Horny

Corrupting our youth, melting our popsicles

**W**HEN KATY PERRY revealed the title of her sophomore album earlier this year, the members of dream-pop duo Beach House took to Twitter and vented about the linguistic proximity to their own latest, *Teen Dream*. Yet if anyone seems qualified to invoke the fantasy life of America's youth, surely it's the woman who sealed her transition from Christian-pop piety to electro-glam abandon with "I Kissed a Girl."

*Teenage Dream* won't disappoint parents looking for reasons to worry about their kids: On the title track, Perry encourages someone to "put your hands on me in my skintight jeans," while "Last Friday Night" recounts an evening of nonstop naughtiness—streaking, skinny-dipping, and ménage à trois-ing. Elsewhere, "Peacock" deploys a double entendre even Ke\$ha might find crude.

Perry delivers the gurl-gone-wild stuff with requisite sass, but she actually sounds more engaged on "Not Like the Movies" and "One That Got Away"—quieter cuts that recall her singer-songwriter days at L.A.'s Hotel Café. And she's most convincing on "Circle the Drain," a surprisingly ferocious techno-goth rant in which she unloads on a pill-popping ex with brutal finality. "You had the world in the palm of your hand," she sneers, "but you fucking choked." Word to Russell Brand: If Katy steals one of your bits, let her. **MIKAEL WOOD**

KATY PERRY  
Teenage Dream  
\*\*\*\*\*  
CAPITO



FROM LEFT: LANE COOPER, EMMA SUMMERTON

It's Over"). That's okay when the results feel as intimate as they do here, where old friendships complement low-key tunes with intricate textures and an empathetic swing that's only intermittently propulsive. In a McCartney-esque maneuver, Finn features his wife Sharon on co-lead vocals for the album's centerpiece and highlight, "Isolation"; the eerie, unguarded results suggest Wings stripped of silliness. **BARRY WALTERS**

**Dax Riggs**  
Say Goodnight to the World  
★★★★★  
FANTASY

All dressed up like a next-gen Elvis from hell in our vampire-obsessed culture, a few *Twilight* followers could conceivably graduate from Edward Cullen to Dax Riggs. The Texas-based singer-songwriter's second solo album pops Sun Studios into the middle of Transylvania, with Riggs as a pensive, late-night Elvis. He references hell, Satan, witches, gallows, and other morbid tokens, in a steady croon. Then he kicks the "gravedirt" off his "blue suede shoes" and covers "Heartbreak Hotel" as a sepulchral dirge. But getting so lonely he could die should not be a problem for someone as pointedly undead as Riggs. **DAVID MENICINI**

**Department of Eagles**  
Archive 2003-2006  
★★★★★  
AMERICAN DUST

Tender postprandial laments for Grizzled completists Grizzled Bear's Daniel Rossen has been making time for side project Department of Eagles (his first proper band) since 2000, working with NYU buddy Fred Nicolaus to craft shifts, sometimes goofy baroque pop adorned with electronic textures. So this compilation—hushed, self-serious, at times chingily beautiful—reveals a vulnerable underbelly. It's not an essential set, but there's enough here (take the gallant "Grand Army Plaza" for a stroll or verse) to tide you over till the Velvettones crew sets sail again. **SEAN FENNESSEY**

**EL-P**  
Weareallgoingtoburninhell-megamix3  
★★★★★  
GOLD DUST

Finding funky majesty in dank culture jamming Hip-hop metalists EL-P continues to score the impending robot uprising on this 46-minute, quasi-industrial instrumental suite. With double-time beats, Trent Reznor-level distortion, lost-in-the-matrix digital goodies, and the occasional gunshot, megamix3 works like a

headbanger companion to E's 2007 album, *I'll Sleep When You're Dead*—soaring, paranoid, and ghoulish. Swooping synths squirm uneasily out of the same early-'80s retro-future haunted by Giorgio Moroder, Francis Monkman, and Vangelis; but this hip-hop purist jams them all through the bluesy, moody boom of Schoofy D's crusty slaughterhouse. **CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN**

**Endless Boogie**  
Full House Head  
★★★★★  
NO QUARTER

Like the *slo-mo* evolution of prehistoric shredding. Be the riff. Over 76 minutes and eight tracks (and utilizing what sounds like half as many chords), New York City satini seekers Endless Boogie give themselves fully to heavy blues choogles that ooze toward eternity. The band's devotion, and listener's faith, is rewarded with moments—sometimes occurring three minutes into a song, sometimes nine—where muttering singer-guitarist Top Dollar's perfectly placed bent-fuzz notes and the rhythm section's electric mud groove attain nothing-is-something transcendence. "Rubber and road," he croaks on "Tarmac City," "settin' me free." Full House Head offers another, grainer path. **DAVID MARCHESE**



**Alejandro Escovedo**  
Street Songs of Love  
★★★★★  
FANTASY

Fad of the dark arts offers hopeful glimmer With a mournful voice and handful of musical styles spanning introspective folk and blast-furnace punk, Alejandro Escovedo never makes dull albums, but his dark aura can be overwhelming. The wonderful *Street Songs of Love* brightens slightly without losing intensity on hopeful anthem "Anchor," lusty stomper "Silver Cloud," and the spooky "Tula," on which he murmurs, "There's more to this life than a random kiss... over a jungle beat." His duet with Bruce Springsteen on the roiling "Faith" is a great attention-getter, though unnecessary—Escovedo is best experienced undiluted. **JON YOUNG**

**Fat Joe**  
The Darkside Vol. 1  
★★★★★  
Terror Squad/IEI

The reassuring crossfire of dope in all its forms Fat Joe's dark side—an abyss of Colombian kilograms and Mac-11s—is actually his comfort zone. "In the '80s I made so many premature babies, put niggas in Mercedes," he spits gleefully on "I Am Crack" over Just Blaze's blistering black-oploration beat. The Bronx native's tenth LP is consumed by

legacy: his lengthy career, his harrowing life, and his craft. Backed by rhythmic-pensive pianos from Premier on the album's closer, Joe laments the loss of another veteran: "Gangster? Fuck that, I'm Gang Starr," he says. "Tall Nas hip-hop is dead now, my man's gone." **BEN DE TRICK**

**Foals**  
Total Life Forever  
★★★★★  
SUB POP

For natty Brit post-punks, friction beats sincerity Most British bands get better as they get quieter. Not Foals. This quintet's strong suit is flailing like ten arms on a single synchronized body. The slower, more sincere follow-up to their tense, ultra-light debut often minimizes beats and maximizes melody. But Foals aren't particularly personable songwriters or singers. Contrast the sub-Bloc Party verses and chorus of "After Glow" with the midsection where they flit about like fireflies getting frisky in a bonfire. Here's a case where the motion matters more than the meat. **BARRY WALTERS**

**Fol Chen**  
Part II: The New December  
★★★★★  
ASTHMATIC KITTY

Cryptic, bookish pop-funk disappears up own booty As their "The Beautiful Ones" contribution to SPIN's *Purple Rain* compilation

last year proved, this Los Angeles band loves Prince something fierce, right down to the straight-faced Wendy and Lisa female vocal stylings. But on Fol Chen's third album, they forego freakiness for nerdy esoterica, exploring etymology and the distorted drums of "The Holograms." Despite help from members of Liars, *The New December* slips from the itchy bliss of "In Ruins" to the title track's tedious glitching and the castrato coss of "CULI." **ANDY BETA**

**Francis and the Lights**  
It'll Be Better  
★★★★★  
CANTORA

Thin White Geek is breathless to impress As hip-hop's latest nerdy, white-boy muse, Francis Starlite is a Drake- and Kanye-approved, Eraser-headed ball of overearnest who can moonwalk like Fred Astaire. Tightly wound to the point of unease, the Brooklyn singer-pianist's third album has its occasional irresistible moments. "For Days" glides from slap-bass boogie to nimble, 1999-inspired funk guitar, while "Kneets to the Floor" and "Darling, It's Alright" show Francis' study of both George Benson's jazz licks and David Bowie's self-assurance. Though smothering in its ambition, *It'll Be Better* remains impressively deft. **KENNY HERZOG**



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# Gyptian

Hold You  
★★★★★  
VP

**Reggae crooner tries to last until morning after** After this honey-tongued Jamaican singer scored an unlikely crossover hit with the summer-friendly slow jam "Hold You," he merited a follow-up album—stat. So here it is, his third, and opinion will hinge on how listeners feel about the inimitable instrument that's front and center: Gyptian's voice. If you find its falsetto-tinged, mildly pinched, occasionally Auto-Tuned tone cloying, for get it. Should these same qualities prove endearing—with a winning sound that's part

R&B, part reggae, and part old-school dancehall—then Gyptian may yet elude the dreaded one-hit-wonder tag. **BAZ DREISINGER**

# How to Destroy Angels

How to Destroy Angels EP  
★★★★★  
THE NULL CORPORATION

**The happy couple would like to scare you shitless** Trent Reznor's dark symphonies of clank succeed when their bleakness is broken by moments of humanity or hilarity, both of which come from the Nine Inch Nails mastermind's serrated scream. But when Reznor's haunted-space-ship beats combine with the seductive coo of former

West Indian Girl vocalist Mariqueen Mandig (his wife) on the trio's debut EP, the results too often suggest a plodding, Matrix-style soundtrack. Funk percussion and vocoder trickery enliven "Fur Lined," though, while "BBB" and "Parasite" charm with Reznor's old perverse swagger and ugly hiss. **SPENCER KORNHABER**

# Jaili

That's How We Burn  
★★★★★  
SUB POP

**Tastefully plucky debut from garage-pop smarties** These Four Milwaukee dudes mix the beaming choruses of '80s new wave with the lovable

Though lately spoken of as a mere stepping stone toward the more restrained, and commercially viable, alt-country scene of the '90s, cowpunk of the '80s took thick licks in the opposite direction: revving 'em up, not cooling 'em down. Its hotbed was near Hollywood, and it burned out fast. But briefly, even R.E.M. and the Replacements joined in the fun.

# RANK AND FILE

Sundown  
GLAYD 1982

**1** Brothers Chip and Tony Kinman, foregrounding harmonies that were hardly close—imagine an inordinately dry Johnny Cash up against a weaselly womanly bushing violet—in the class-warring of L.A. punk troupe the Dils for sagebrush pop rock as schooled in Emilio Moricone as Merle Haggard. On later records, they took themselves too seriously, but on this debut, hooky ditties like "Amanda Ruth" and "The Conductor Were Black" win out. Secret weapon: former Nun and future adult-alternative hero Alejandro Escovedo on guitar.

# X

**2** After two landmark sleaze-punk LPs about the urban underbelly and the perils of bohemian couplehood, these three L.A. flea-market beatniks and pompadoured rockabilly guitarist explore their heretofore hidden rural-route roots. Several songs still romanticize philandering, though the best might be "The Hate Nuts," which instead romanticizes real-life blue-collar taverns such as "The Aorta Bar, Detroit's Main Vein." The sweetest melody comes via Leadbelly ("Dancing With Tears in My Eyes"); the album's primary inspiration, reportedly, was the 1980 debut of cowcollateral Exene Cervenka's sister Mirlene.

# ESSENTIALS

# AFTER THRASHY NIHILISM FLAMED OUT, COWPUNK GIDDY-UPPED FROM THE ASHES

By Chuck Eddy



# JASON AND THE SCORCHERS

Fervor  
(EP ANTHRA, 1983)

**3** On cowpunk's definitive document, the "punk" part is a misnomer; mostly, these Music City pyromaniacs back Jason Ringenberg's moraly conflicted, hiccupping, revival-tent honky-tonk with hyped-up post-Stones hard rock, though a couple of cuts betray more modern Devo-luted whack-cracking. The centerpiece, an overdriven take on Dylan's "Absolutely Sweet Marie," was added to the original indie EP when major label EMI picked it up.

# MEAT PUPPETS

Meat Puppets II  
SST 1984

**4** Two Kirkwood brothers, tumbling like tumbleweeds out of Phoenix, ride their rusty, nasal cactus-mobile across desolate desert

plateaus toward the Aurora Borealis, making Neil Young, the Grateful Dead, and bluegrass safe for the hardcore hordes. When bad folks die, the heaviest track explains, they go to the lake of fire and fry. Kurt Cobain emphasized enough to cover that and two others, on MTV Unplugged nine years hence.

# MEKONS

Fear and Whiskey  
SUN 1985

**5** Amateurist Brit avant punks, from the same Leeds milieu that coughed up Gang of Four, emphasized a transition they first instigated on a roots-tinged '83 EP. Distorted with dead echoes, obsessed with displacement, disgrace, despair, and death on the battlefield, their tradition-mining is more shelter from the storm than peristaltic retreat. They close by resuscitating Hank Williams' "Lost Highway," whose road still hasn't been found.

# LONG RYDERS

State of Our Union  
GLAYD 1985

**6** To pinpoint their self-conscious distance from Nashville, consider that these janglers emerged from L.A.'s neo-psychedelic Paisley Underground, and main man Ted Griffin later wrote a Gram Parsons biography. Yet somehow, they land on a big label and tunelessly tackle Reaganomic hard times: "Louie Louie" descendent "Looking for Lewis and Clark" and Memphis soul-station homage "W.D.I.A." even place the union's state in a coherent historical context.

# DANNY & DUSTY

The Lost Weekend  
A&M 1985

**7** In their respectively druggy City of Angels groove bands Green on Red and the Dream Syndicate, Dan Stuart and Steve Wynn weren't bad on supermemorable songs, though the latter had guitar-god Karl Precedo expanding minds. Here, though, the pair switch their inebriant of choice to liquor, and with rundry fellow barflies fashion a piano-pussy blonde on Blonde ramshackle that hilariously champions all the one-eyed potty mouths and number-running fuck-ups at their local.

# THOSE DARLINS

Those Darlins  
ON WIDE GARDEN, 2009

**8** Sure, a few other imposte indie-twang albums in the past quarter century haven't succumbed to alt country's usual tasteless lethargy—check the Woodbox Gang, for instance, or the Legendary Shack Shakers. But none's denying that this trio of leggy Southern hassles get cowpunk's spirit just right: snuggleshot stomps about driving drunk and eating entire chickens, played so specious you willingly excuse the sloppiness. One of the catchiest, "Cannonball Blues," dates to 1929.



shrug of '90s guitar-based indie-nice-guy party rock somewhere between a less excitable Hold Steady and a more distortion-crazed Violent Femmes. But what elevates their debut beyond your average twee-punk rager is the gentle psych dabbings: extra delay on a guitar solo, an errant "ooh-ahh-ooh," a dubby Panda Bear flourish, and the swirling noise that murmurs through the background of the cheerful "Snake Shakes." CHRISTOPHER R. WEINGARTEN

## JP, Chrissie and the Fairground Boys

**Fidelity**  
★★★★★  
LA/INDEPENDENT  
Legend, Intrepid unknown, not to Sonny and Cher Kudos to main Pretender Chrissie Hynde for changing the script: Her collaboration with young Welsh singer JP Jones feels fresher than anything she's done in years. Though Hynde has said emphatically that they're not an offstage couple, she toys with this tantalizing prospect throughout Fidelity's easygoing folk-

and country-tinged tunes, sighing, "His time is tomorrow / Mine was yesterday" on the bittersweet ballad "Perfect Lover." If Jones' strangled rasp can't match her sultry authority, and a few songs feel half-written, the sweaty duet "Fairground Luck" argues convincingly that spontaneity beats careful craftsmanship. JON YOUNG

## Korn

Korn III: Remember Who You Are

★★★★★

ROADRUNNER

For those who loved Korn II: Electric Blue... Following a synthed-up self-titled album and one they made with Avril Lavigne producers the Matrix, Korn go back to nu-metal basics on the aptly titled Remember Who You Are, which was produced by rap-rock OG Ross Robinson. Remarkably, a decade and a half of weird-kid worship hasn't brightened frontman Jonathan Davis' outlook: "I always get fucked in the end!" he howls rather definitively in "Fear Is a Place to Live." His persistent self-



flagellation could do with more hooks, but Remember packs pain by the pound. MIKAEL WOOD

## The Love Language

**Libraries**

★★★★★

MERGE

Scruffy dramatist builds a wounded Wall of Sound "I want you to beware of me 'cause I've got a big heart to feed." Stuart McLamb croons on the Love Language's stunning

second album. And he's not kidding. Libraries seems huge, a cathedral of the grandiose emotional desperation that Phil Spector and Brian Wilson once framed so dramatically. McLamb and producer BJ Burton have an unerring feel for classic pop arrangements, evoking a landscape that's a cross between Swinging London and the ambient galaxy where doo-wop went to die, with McLamb's epic wail as your

guide to the cosmos of romantic trauma. DAVID MENON

## Maps & Atlases

**Perch Patchwork**

★★★★★

BARSKX

Progy polymaths shine with hookier pleasures This Chicago band's skitish energy recalls Talking Heads and TV on the Radio, lightening any dark subject matter with twitzy bursts of color. Early EPs were

lumped in with math and prog bands, but those impulses recede on this debut full-length: Clearly there's some showing off on "Carrying the Wet Wood," with intricately intertwined fretwork and drumming, but it's all in service of sing-alongs, tied together by Dave Davison's pinched, inimitable voice. When friendly flutes invade skewed pop ("Perch Patchwork") and a drum line becomes the primary instrument ("The Charm"), genre tags seem pretty inadequate. JOSH MODELL

## Menomena

**Mines**

★★★★★

BARSKX

Frisky art pop devolves into childlike tinkering Thanks to either undiagnosed OCD or their own homemade sampling software, this Portland trio's songs seem compartmentalized, with drum loops, organ blasts, and knickknack noises layered discretely like toys arranged on a collector's shelf. Previously, that technique fostered playfulness, but



# High Swoon

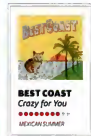
Bicoastal dreamer has major crush on summer's myths

**D**ESPITE ALL THE girl-pop harmonies and kitty-by-the-seaside art, you get the sense that Beth Cosentino, like all of us, has a complicated relationship with summertime. She moved back to California from Brooklyn in 2009, proclaiming on MySpace that she formed Best Coast so people could "make out to it on a beach blanket." But listen to her debut and you find Cosentino herself in an iconic pop pose far from the sand: "Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting by the phone."

With a voice as brassy and aggrieved as Neko Case's, but as echo-drenched as the Crystals', Cosentino luxuriates in the heartbreak that lay at the center of the '60s sunniest songs. She wants to leave the house and catch some rays, but is too lovesick to even go to the store for sunscreen.

The routine might get tiresome if Cosentino didn't prize yearning melodies and deceptive simplicity so highly. Each short track dives into a majestic coda and leavens the swooning with blunt, modern humor. "I lost my job. I miss my mom. I wish my cat would talk," she sasses on "Goodbye," later adding that nothing makes her happy, "not even TV or a bunch of weed." *Crazy for You* is a soundtrack to bikini season as it's actually experienced, racked by impossible expectations and as high as the tide line.

SPENCER KORNHABER





## REISSUES

### DIGGIN' IN THE CRATES FOR UNTOLD TREASURES

By Andrew Hultkrans



Daniel Johnston faces down his toughest foe.

#### DANIEL JOHNSTON The Story of an Artist

**1** Rock history boasts its share of genius lunatics—Brian Wilson, Syd Barrett, et al.—but most enjoyed a period of productive sanity before succumbing to madness. Daniel Johnston's bipolar symptoms emerged earlier and are inextricably tied to his art, both musical and visual. A Beatles fanatic from West Virginia, he recorded hours of brilliantly untinged piano-based songs—through a boombox mic on cheap cassettes—first at his parents' house, then in Austin, Texas, where he swept up at a McDonald's. This six-CD box gathers the early-'80s material that earned him such fans as Tom Waits and Kurt Cobain.

#### R.E.M. Fables of the Reconstruction: 25th Anniversary Edition

**2** Though *Fables* was their third album, R.E.M. went into these 1985 sessions with sophomore-slump anxiety. The songs were untested, and recording with producer Joe Boyd (Palmer Convention, Nick Drake) in London left them homesick and alienated. Increasingly moody, eccentric lyrics evoked legends of the old South, and the music was their prettiest and strangest yet. "Green Grow the Rushes" is typical—a sly, gorgeous protest song about migrant workers and globalization. This new set's extras include 14 demos.

#### MILES DAVIS Bitches Brew: 40th Anniversary Collector's Edition

**3** By 1970, Miles Davis was feeling outpaced in the era of funk, psychedelia, and free jazz. James Brown, Sly Stone, and Jimi Hendrix were more relevant; Ornette Coleman and John Coltrane were nonpolarizing the avant-garde. Davis had already incorporated electric instruments, but *Bitches Brew* was the mother-love—two keyboardists, two bassists, drummers and percussionists,

plus John McLaughlin's slashing electric guitar augmenting the brass and reeds. Aggressive, chaotic, often harsh. It was his big-gest seller to date. This three-CD and DVD box adds alternate takes, audio of a Tanglewood performance and video of a contemporary Copenhagen concert.

#### THE GERMS

**4** These L.A. hardcore aesthetes had been dormant for a year when mercurial, self-destructive frontman



Darby Crash reunited the band with two missions in mind: Show nascent skinheads "what punk was like when we were around" and to supposedly earn enough money for a fatal dose of heroin. Both goals were achieved, sadly. Crash's untamed charisma and lexical mischief are in full flush; then he was dead a week later.

#### CHARANJIT SINGH Synthesizing: Ten Ragas to a Disco Beat

**5** A wedding band leader and Bollywood soundtrack musician during the 1960s and '70s, Charanjit Singh was also an unwitting electronic pioneer. Over two days in 1982, he holed up in a studio with early synthesizers and drum machines (including the block-rockin' Roland 808 and 909) to record bracing, meditative electro versions of classic Indian music. The sine-wave whines and squelchy bloop-beeps sound like early acid house or Kraftwerk covering Ravi Shankar.

#### VARIOUS ARTISTS Local Customs: Lone Star Lowlands

**6** This batch of ace 1970s throwaways from producer Mickey Rourke's Lowland studio in Beaumont, Texas, comes wrapped in a browned-out cover photo of a bunch of Southern hippies, one of whom resembles an unconscious Keith Jarrett holding a can of Schlitz. This is not false advertising; you can almost smell the weed resin on the tracks, which range from dazed ZZ Top boogies to glazed folk-rock and singer-songwriter reveries.

Menomena's fourth album mostly juts broods. Even "TAOS," a lusty, Stones-influenced stampee, glances at its feet halfway through and ends up two minutes too long. When Menomena don't overthink, *Mines* delivers trippy triumphs like the rushing-and-stopping "Killenail," a modular epic that evokes Washington Crossing the Delaware rendered in hand-painted Legos. **SPENCER KORNHABER**

#### Midnight Juggernauts

**The Crystal Axis**  
**SIBERIA/VALENTIA**  
Like a marsupial MGMT, blissfully out to lunch. This unabashedly spongy Melbourne three-piece dramatically improve upon a spotty debut by letting their prog flag fly. Gone are the French house beats and repetitive riffs that gave their heretofore hooks immediate impact and squashed everything else. Instead, knotty arrangements of alternately poppy and moody tunes suggest Pink Floyd gone new wave; chugging guitars skank around gloriously garish mellotron choirs and cosmic Moog coze, while the lyrics babbled nonsense about glorified viragos and shining on like (crazy) diamonds. All that's missing is the Laserium. **BARRY WALTERS**

#### Mt. St. Helens Vietnam Band Where the Messengers Meet

**Feisty ambition turns gloomy for family act Opener "At Night"** finds this indie-rock quartet gazing over a dusky swamp from their front porch, repeating elliptical lyrics and blues-guitar grunts with escalating gusto as if they're repeatedly trying to strike a match. For the rest of this second album, the diverse can (including a married couple and a 15-year-old drummer) wander in thirly darkness, laying down dour, bustling arrangements. Sad-eyed generalists with a knack for cinematic spookiness, they are spook Wolf Parade's adventurousness, but often descend into lumbering, Interpol-style self-seriousness. **SPENCER KORNHABER**

#### Kylie Minogue Aphrodite

**Playing her title's role, the disco goddess returns. Finally even the stars realize that no one wants ersatz hip-hop or Americanized AOR from Australia's ultimate pop tart. Club crossover boffins Stuart Price and Calvin Harris bring the European boom-boom and post-Gaga hooks on every synth-soaked track, not just the ones cowritten by Nicky Spleen and Keane. Everywhere, the euphoria of her first-ever U.S. tour last year still lingers: Whether oh-nh-ing through "Illusion" in a heavenly over-dubbed choir or calling out to a "Cupid Boy" while riding a menacing dance-rock bass**

line, Minogue delivers bliss like no other (wo)man or machine. **BARRY WALTERS**

#### Mountain Man Made the Harbor

**Liberal-arts folkies essay haunted-campfire songs** Famed as Vermont's Bennington College, this female trio play bare-bones folk, featuring lustrous harmonies adorned by occasional acoustic guitar. But *Made the Harbor* isn't particularly soothing or quaint. The quiet sizzle of "Soft Skin" is really an exploration of sexual violence, and on "Animal Tracks" they trill, "the bright baby eyes of a chickadee." In loopy, eye-rolling fashion, peeling away any old-timey sheen to signify a creepy, untamed world. The snappy "How'm I Doin'" evokes primordial country with a strain of belligerence in its chipper swagger. **JON YOUNG**

#### Mt. St. Helens Vietnam Band Where the Messengers Meet

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#### Plies

**Goon Affiliated**  
**SLIP-N-SIDE/ATLANTIC**  
Mushmouth MC endlessly amused by oral sex, Gus A raunchy hobgoblin whose shriveled exhortations praise criminal cohorts and

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## Bongview

So-bored surfer punk worships at altar of Billie Joe

**B**EHOLD, THE GREATEST mindfuck to emerge from the '90s nostalgia mill since that Nicktoons coffee-table book a few years back: indie rock has reclaimed Green Day.

To be fair, on candy-chainsaw single "Post Acid," *Wavves*' Nathan Williams actually sounds more like a long-lost member of blink-182, though he'd likely make a strong case that he's a child of the Descendents. But it was Billie Joe Armstrong and pals who definitively balled up the snottiness and poppiness that Williams so thoroughly nails throughout his third album, which tones down but not wholly abandons the lo-fi orneriness of 2009's breakout *Wavves*.

It's not just *Kerplunk!* 2.0. "Why Won't You Come," for example, approximates a cloudy day with lonely sleigh bells and droning doo-wop vocals. But *King of the Beach*'s specialty is Warped Tour-ready choruses, charred with noise and peppered with lyrics from a self-hating surfer teen who sees sunburn as spiritual penance for being a burnout. "Wavves crush my flesh and skull, but I still feel stupid," Williams wails on "Super Soaker," as if to point out that

kings of the beach necessarily have self-esteem problems. After all, you can't build a parent-pleasing career spending your days stoned and in board shorts. When your whole life's a vacation destination, punk rock may be the only escape. *SPENCER KORNBABER*



**WAVVES**  
King of the Beach  
FAT POSSUM

detail sexual conquests. Plies delivers a wildly funny—if wholly inconsequential—third album. There's "Rob Myself," where he juxtaposes his urge to steal with his accrued wealth, "Model," in which he describes his magnetic appearance, and "Gonette," a love song with an R&B hook, tender organs, and bobbing BOB kicks ("For her birthday I bought her a pink ski mask," he says of his soul mate). It's an entertaining, ribald affair, but, like most aggressively lowbrow humor, the jokes get old fast.

BEN DETRICK

### Ra Ra Riot

The Orchard

★★★★★

BARSUK

**Raucously literate brood obsess over minutiae** This sextet's poetry-quoting, cello-chugging debut came with plenty of stop-start, hum-along rockers, as if the band was out to prove that liberal-arts fops could soundtrack keggers. But here, they deliver the sort of mid-tempo, orch-pop fussiness that they'd been praised for transcending. A few tracks possess a quicker pulse, like the intriguingly twitchy "Massachusetts" and the aerobic, bass-driven fairy tale "Boy," while "Too Dramatic" resurrects the band's crowd-pleasing ambitions, with a keyboard breakdown worthy of Journey. *SPENCER KORNBABER*

### El Paperboy

Read  
Come and Get It

★★★★★

CAPITOL

**Baby-faced soul belter invokes legendary ghosts** The third album (and first for a major) from this Boston-born, Mississippi- and Chicago-bred singer-guitarist is bound to inspire Sam Cooke comparisons, but *Get It* just as frequently stir up Jackson 5 dance fever ("Come and Get It") and cries CCR grit ("Tell Me What I Want to Hear"). Reed's blue-eyed soul ballads can lack passion, and the album's subject matter is fairly generic, but on "Just Like Me," his boyishly fur-

ous rasp transforms familiar blues tropes into something simultaneously self-effacing and brash. *KENNY HERZOG*

### School of Seven Bells

Disconnect From Desire

★★★★★

VAGRANT

**Gorgeously hazy drift takes more familiar shape** Alpinians, School of Seven Bells' intriguing 2008 debut, blended dreamy, deep-focus soundscapes with spiraling melodies sung in close harmony. On *Desire*, guitarist Ben Curtis and twin sister vocalists, Alejandra and Claudia Deheza, rein in and smooth out those same elements, as songs like the uplifting "Windstorm" and majestic "Jovanni" fit space-mother sing-alongs and relaxed Madchester rhythms into snappier verse-chorus structures. Fussy knob-twiddling grounds a couple of tracks, but this skyward-reaching album delivers plenty of solidly earthy pleasures. *DAVID MARCHESE*

### Secret Cities

Pink Graffiti

★★★★★

WESTERN VINYL

**Shrewdly pretty tribute to indie's beloved chorboys** While *Spins*' No. 1 Album of 2009, Animal Collective's *Merriwether Post Pavilion*, had its head-swimming sonics instantaneously integrated by other bands (hello, Yeasayer), it has taken until the second album by North Dakota's

Secret Cities for Brooklyn to properly mimic Brooklyn's other breakout band, Grizzly Bear. From grandiose opener "Pink City" to the haunting mixture of reverberating voice and piano on the title track, it's evident that singer-songwriters MJ Parker and Charlie Coley have closely studied *Veckatimest*'s artful harmonies. But with the dancey percolations of "Pink Graffiti Pt. 1" and the sweeping strings of "Vamos a la Playa," Secret Cities gradually find their own voice. *ANDY BETA*

### Steel Train

Steel Train

★★★★★

TERRIBLE THIRLLS

**Sound and fury result in love-drunk hot air** The third album from New Jersey's Steel Train is a textbook example of how to use splashy arrangements and high-octane performances to enhance tepid material. In milder hands, Jack Antonoff's songs would be tedious emo fodder; the generic musings of a guy who claims he'd risk life itself for love. But Antonoff's sweet, breathless voice, boosted by jagged guitars and clattering percussion, creates the thrilling—if albeit, brief—illusion of volatile emotions about to erupt. "Fall Asleep," a touching piano-and-strings ballad that closes the album, moves in a welcome, less frenetic direction. *JOHN YOUNG*



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# Unsung Funkateer

OutKast's steadier half puts that rattle in your trunk

**F**OR YEARS, ANDRÉ "3000" Benjamin has been valorized as OutKast's engine, its creative heartbeat, its auteur, and its soul. But Dre is nowhere to be found these days. So his partner did what he had to do: disprove conventional wisdom. From the first moments of the intro, "Feel Me," the whistles, wah-wah guitar, and lighthearted talk box announce a uniformity of purpose—funk is the game and Antwan "Big Boi" Patton is not playing. Aided by producers Organized Noize and Mr. DJ, *Sir Lucious Left Foot* is a monster of an album.

This isn't exactly a solo debut—that was the flip side of OutKast's 2004 double

LP, *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below*. But even more than that multiplatinum slab of funk, there is an enveloping heaviness here. You sink into the bass, as if drowning in a pulsating pool of quicksand, spiraling deeper toward the bottom end. Big Boi has always been a deceptively elegant rhymist—"I'm like a crocodile walkin' around with alligator skin," he purrs on "Follow Us"—and he's in top, post-pimp form. Handing off massive choruses to Janelle Monáe, Jamie Foxx, and B.o.B, he steals your girl, your dignity, and then your couch—in that order—and what's more, you're fine with it. It takes an extra special sort of swagger to pull this off. But then, Big Boi has always been the best-kept secret. **SEAN FENNESSEY**



**BIG BOI**  
*Sir Lucious Left Foot: The Son of Chico Dusty*  
\*\*\*\*\*  
DEF JAM

## Sun Kil Moon

Admiral Fell Promises

\*\*\*\*\*

CALDO VERDE

**Master of moosey tableau** stripes down his anguish Mark Kozalek has long been a fruitful inhabitant of the acoustic balladeer/craggy edge-loner persona perfected by Neil Young. The big shift on his beautifully recorded, intermittently moving fourth album under the Sun Kil Moon moniker is that only his nylon-string guitar plucking now accompanies his wounded croon. Mourning Spanish-style codas on the bittersweet "Alesund" and bitter, sweeter "The Leaning Tree" could soften a bandito's heart; but elsewhere, cloudy melodies and moony lyrics (birds figure prominently) tip languor into listlessness. **GAVIO MARCHESE**

## The Swears

Rip Riders

\*\*\*\*\*

REMADO

**Texas thrashers discover inner boogie...on Mars?** These metal loyalists' third monolith is steeped in

hokey, dystopian sci-fi, but *Warp Riders'* interplanetary narrative possesses a charming conviction. It's also somewhat at odds with the band's emerging fixation on boogie rock, a genre typified by adolescent wish fulfillment (i.e., songs about fucking). But alongside the *Sword's* bulldozing first two albums, go-for-broke riffs "Lawlands" and the titling track boast more intriguing dynamics. And apart from cheesy glam misstep "Night City," they creatively fuse ZZ Top and Nazareth rhythms with Hawkwind prog, sounding both badass and oddly innovative. **KENNY HERZOG**

## The-Dream

Love King

\*\*\*\*\*

RADIO KILLA/DEF JAM

**R&B hit man romances everything within reach** "Radio Killa"? Sure, but the R&B ATLien behind "Umbrella" and "Single Ladies" is also an auteur of worldly personal, brilliantly low-brow, and dazzlingly state-of-the-art pop albums. As bawdy, referential, and effortless-sounding as

ever, Terius "The-Dream" Nash takes his long-playing love affair to the next level on this third solo effort, fading snappy summer-jam contenders into seething urban-rock suites. Mostly, though, The-Dream loves to love, so much so that you can hear it through the fourth wall: "Know this song is over / But I can't get up off ya." **MARC HOGAN**

## 3OH3

Streets of Gold

★★

ATLANTIC

**Bamboozling brats punk the masses once more** As anyone who's ever worked retail will attest, some people are so unfaithfully thickheaded you suspect that they're stalling sociopathic geniuses. 3OH3 is the punk-crook equivalent. Over brutish synths and hammy beats, the puerile brosefs' third album shares, among other witticisms: "Gonna have a house party in my house" ("House Party") and "We can do an album / Or we can do it viral / Spread it like an STD you got back in high school" ("I Can Do

Anything"). Hopefully, they're sipping a Chianti, finishing a Sudoku, and laughing hysterically at all of us right now. **STACEY ANDERSON**

## Versus

On the Ones and Threes

\*\*\*\*\*

MERGE

**Indie enigmas resurface with an ominous thump** With the original lineup reconvening for their first album in a decade, *Versus* equal the eclectic, tautly melodic indie pop they crafted throughout the '90s. Weirdly calm yet supremely uneasy, *On the Ones and Threes* fluctuates constantly from folk to psychedelia to grunge,

often in a single song. Guitarist Richard Bailyut and bassist Fontaine Troupe croon dejectedly about death and other downers on songs like the gorgeous "Into Blue" and the stormy title track, noting, "We're all just specks of dust," as they cast a disturbing spell that lingers long after the music's over. **JON YOUNG**

## Paul Wall

Heart of a Champion

\*\*\*\*\*

SWISHHOUSE/ASYLUM

**If his teeth are shining, he's not complaining** This famously grill-adorned Houston rapper has experienced diminishing returns since his platinum-selling 2005 major-label debut,

but there's no desperation here. Wall cruises along with his usual simile-packed musings about wood-grained cars, fat pockets, and jewelry resembling "snow cones." Production—split capably between blink-182 drummer Travis Barker and duo Beanz & Kornbread—confirms rumbling 808s, sawing synths, and chopped-and-screwed hooks. Over the melancholy horns of "Live It" (alongside Raekwon, Jay Electronica, and Yelawolf), he raps modestly of material success: "No more ramen noodle spread / No more struggle and strife." A veteran rapper without bitterness is a treat. **BEN DETRICK**

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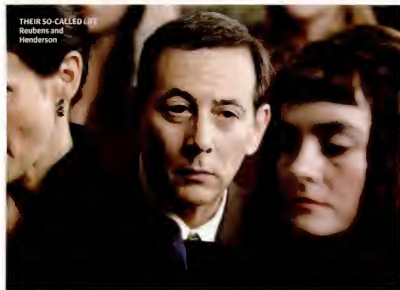
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## Unhappy Ending

Bitterness prevails in the disconcerting sequel to *Happiness*

**E**VEN IF YOU'RE unfamiliar with the award-winning gloom of director Todd Solondz, you might guess that a film titled *Happiness* is not about raindrops on roses. The director's third feature arrived in 1998 as a bilious comedy about sexual violence and emotional frailty, topics revisited—and further beaten into the ground—in this follow-up. An entirely new and formidable cast steps into the old roles, which, together with the allegorical storytelling, gives the movie the feel of a theater piece, a vehement one-act festee skewering the human condition.

Three grown sisters are at the suffering heart of the fable. Joy (Shirley Henderson), idealistic to the point of childishness, is haunted by the ghost of a suicidal ex (Paul Reubens). Single-mom Trish (Janney) navigates the dating scene while her two youngest kids believe that their dad is



**LIFE DURING  
WARTIME**  
★★★  
ALLISON JANNEY,  
ALLY SHEEDY  
R, NOT RATED

dead. In fact, he's a pedophile reemerging from prison in a plotline that deserved its own movie, preferably a sinewy film noir that would allow actor Carán Hinds plenty of time to inhabit this ex-con's flinching persona. Finally, there's Helen, a neurotic screenwriter who's vain, superior, and strung out on herself, a role for which Sheedy curls up behind her cigarette like it's a defensive weapon.

The three story lines share an obsession with absolutism, which we know because the characters never stop saying as much. "When would you forget but not forgive?" one asks. "An eye for an eye, then comes forgiveness," offers another. There is a difference between a consistent theme and a blunt object, but it's tempting to pardon Solondz for his tendency to lecture: Beneath the lesson plan, *Life During Wartime* presents scenes that feel as authentic as bad dreams, and sometimes that's happiness enough.

### [DVD SPOTLIGHT]

## Burning

The men of *Mogwai* only occasionally show their faces during these 45 minutes—available with live album *Special Moves* (Rock Action)—culled from three 2009 shows in Brooklyn. As is fitting for a group that mostly operates without lyrics, the black-and-white footage does the talking without standard theatrics. Though the streetscapes come on too strong—the hot-dog carts look positively solemn—there's atmospheric beauty in the close-ups of hands shredding at guitar strings onstage and applauding in the crowd.



## The Extra Man

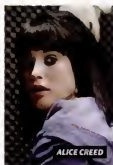
★★½

KEVIN KLINE, PAUL DANO

MIRAGE, R

Wannabe snobs play eccentricity to distracting effect

The directors of *American Splendor* adapt SPIN contributor Jonathan Ames' pleasantly perky novel of manners with results more mixed than a good martini. Louis (Dano), a lonely lad with a compulsion to cross-dress and an addiction to F. Scott Fitzgerald, falls under the wing of Henry (Kline), a down-market dandy who spends most nights either escorting old ladies to society parties or crashing the opera. It's not the transvestitism but rather Dano's stuffy, blue-blazer drag that sucks the air out of this coming-of-age journey. With the supporting ensemble being similarly overdeserved, *Extra Man*'s superfluous oddities threaten to obscure its peculiar charms.



ALICE CREED

## The Disappearance of Alice Creed

★★½

GEEMMA ARTERTON,

EDDIE MARSAN

ANCHOR BAY

Clumsy plotting compromises a perfect crime story

In its flawless first scenes, *Alice Creed* introduces us to the trollish Vic (Marsan) and the appealingly elfin Danny (Martin Compston), who work with the precision of classic safecrackers as they plan to kidnap a spoiled young woman (Arterton) and collect a ransom of two million pounds. But after meticulously rigging a combination of claustrophobic suspense drama and icy procedural, director J. Blakeson allows his movie to fall apart thanks to bad chatter of the Guy Ritchie

variety and a series of final twists that never amount to a proper ending. Nonetheless, Arterton (Prince of Persia) herself steals the show with some excellent seething, scrambling, and raw panic.

## Middle Men

★★★

LUKE WILSON, GIOVANNI RIBISI

PARAMOUNT R

Smug kings' setbacks lead to a titillating adventure

Once upon a time, two childhood friends (Ribisi and Gabriel Macht) grew up, moved to L.A., invented Internet porn, and became cokehead numbskulls in debt to their mobbed-up Russian investors. Doing a shady friend the favor of restructuring the guys' business, clean-cut family man Jack Harris (Wilson) becomes a pioneer of triple-X credit-card billing. He gets rich quick and starts living fast with the on-screen talent—and since he's unable to keep up with either the gangsters' demands or the rate of the numbskull's decline, the film flies forward like one long chase scene. If you're not turned off by a standard-issue subplot about the Valley of temptation, then click ENTER to watch some hot and witty business-thriller action.



THE EXTRA MAN

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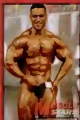


by Ford Fiesta correspondent  
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AUGUST 16, 1977

MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

## WHAT DO THEY GET?

By the summer of 1977, the punk scene in the U.K. was in full bloom, but Manchester's Buzzcocks were the first major band outside London to attract national attention. After releasing the EP *Spiral Scratch* themselves, they settled on United Artists; having the label brass travel 200 miles north to seal the deal was a victory not just for the band, but the city. Kevin Cummins, whose photos came to define Manchester's rise as an underground-rock mecca, captured frontman Pete Shelley signing on the dotted line at the Electric Circus, where the Buzzcocks would play that night with the Jam for impresario Tony Wilson's TV show *So It Goes*. Several thousand miles away, another rock icon was also making news.

**Pete Shelley** It was a good start for the band. The contract was hard to get because we had final control of artwork and how we worked—we weren't going to sell out that easily. Having a record company meant more opportunity. It's the music business—if you can't do the business, it's hard to do the music. I was living with my parents and was no longer getting unemployment because someone had anonymously sent a clipping about our show to the labor exchange. My parents were always supportive, even when I traded in a perfectly good job as a trainee computer operator to become a punk. We signed on the bar because it was the only flat surface.

**Kevin Cummins** People from outside Manchester were wary of us, slightly in awe that this scene was going on so far from London. We thought the Buzzcocks were going to be the biggest band in the world. We were so proud of them. Everyone had just gotten word that Elvis had died, so it really did feel like the end of one era and the beginning of another.

**Shelley** People like to wonder whether the two events are related. Exactly one month later, September 16, I was at Olympic Studios in London doing the vocal for the "Orgasm Addict" single and that was the day [T. Rex's] Marc Bolan died. AS TOLD TO STEVE KANDELL





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